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ADA MOORE'S STORY.

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A NOVEL.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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ADA MOORE'S STORY.

CHAPTER I.

THE HOME OF MY CHILDHOOD.

I WAS born in Northumberland, that dear hospitable county, which Madame de Staël has so grossly maligned in the latter part of her *chef-d'œuvre* 'Corinne.'

But when did a French writer, or indeed any foreigner, understand or appreciate either England or the English?

While they persist in calling our Shakespeare "the great Williams," and look upon the being elected "Lord Mayor" as the

greatest dignity and as the highest honour to which even aristocracy can aspire ; while they aver that we breathe nothing but fog—that we never see the sun—that our soil yields neither fruits to refresh, nor flowers to gladden us—and that we generally terminate our dark lives by suicide, who can look for justice to England from the pens of foreign writers ? Who can oppose Reason to Passion, or refute Prejudice by Truth ? If it is thus in 1866, no wonder that half a century ago Madame de Staël drew so false a picture of our grand old Border Land.

Could the brilliant author of ‘Corinne’ ever have visited a county so rich in noble ruins and historical remains, when she declared that there was not a monument of antiquity to be found far or near ?

How came she to forget Warkworth—its Castle and its Hermitage ? The former mentioned by Shakespeare, whose Henry IV.

speaks of it as even in his time “his worm-eaten Hold of Wark.”

Had she never heard of Dunstanburgh, Bamborough, Morpeth, and many other noble ruins of grand picturesque beauty and great antiquity?—all convicting Madame de Staël of ignorance or injustice!

To me the large features of hospitable Northumbria are like those of a plain but kindly face; and here and there the landscape dimples into beauty, like that plain kindly face when it smiles.

I was born in a snug old red-tiled vicarage, whose front windows looked on the great German Ocean. There was no other habitation near, and of us at Moordell Vicarage it might have been remarked, as Dr. Johnson said of the Duke of Northumberland while living at Alnwick Castle, that our next-door neighbour was the King of Denmark.

We were sheltered on one side by a plantation of dark Scotch firs, the foremost of which, bent and stript by the prevailing east winds, seemed to my fancy, when I was a child, to resemble ragged pilgrims bowing at the foot of the dear old church of Moordell, which stood on a hill close by.

Again, as some of these tall dark pines stood on ground that sloped down to the sea, they seemed to me like black and plumed warriors of a giant race, who, descending the hill to encamp on the sands below, had suddenly been arrested and rooted to the spot by command of the Storm Fiend, or some other potent spirit of the Border Land.

To the north of our dear old parsonage come the sand-hills which border the coast at this part, and which are covered by a rank long grass, not unlike very fine rushes.

Behind Moordell Vicarage rose and spread

vast tracts of purple moorland, rich in grouse and other game; while dancing and sparkling, twisting and twining, laughing and babbling through our grounds, was the Coquet,—a beautiful river, full of clear shallows, rocky ledges, mimic waterfalls, and cool, dark, shady pools, overhung by trees, where, in sunny June, the sly trout loved to hide.

Moordell was a very picturesque spot. I thought so when I had seen no other. I think so still, though now I have seen Mont Blanc at dawn and evening, and by moonlight; beheld the sun rise from the top of the Righi; gazed with awe at the solemn Salvator Rosa glories of the Tête Noire, after having explored all the beauties of Chamounix; and though, from the windows of the room in which I am writing, I overlook a vast expanse of cobalt-coloured sea, rising above dark groves of olive-trees; and

though, as I gaze with rapture at the lovely scene, I desery the peaks of the Berceau Mountain, and a chain of rose-coloured rocks bordering the Bay. While to this enchanted spot Romance lends its magic dreams, and History its living, vivid interest. For lo ! on yonder promontory Bordighera gleams white in the sunshine, and Dr. Antonio, Lucy, Sir John, Speranza Battista, Miss Hutchins, and English John people the spot ; while at sunrise and at sunset Corsica, with its thrilling memories of the great Sesostris of all modern times—of him whose name is empire—throws itself so clearly across the azure main, that every fissure and ravine of its rocky mountains can be traced ; and again at eventide, shrouded, misty, and indistinct, looms in the distance, and appears far, far away !

CHAPTER II.

THE MOORES OF MOORDELL.

FORMING part of the Vicarage of Moordell was one of the old Peil Towers, which belong to the early and warlike history of the Borders. This tower gave stability and interest to the quaint, picturesque vicarage.

My father was the Vicar of Moordell. He was a cadet of the ancient and once valiant Border family, the head of which was called Moore of the Moors.

Two generations of spendthrift absentees had brought down the *prestige*, if not the pride, of the Moore family.

My grandfather had found it necessary to part with every acre of land not strictly entailed, and to let Moor House to a great London merchant, whose family now resided there, except during the shooting season.

My grandmother at his death found herself so much reduced that she had been obliged to take lodgings in Warkworth with her two sons. Until that time she had resided in an old, half-ruined mansion, five miles distant from Moor House. It was, or rather had been for many centuries, the Dower House of the widows of the Moore family.

Surrounded by plantations of very tall and very dark fir-trees, and approachable only by very bad, and in winter almost impracticable roads, it was a very weird, gloomy, and isolated spot. Of course it had the reputation of being haunted.

After my father's death the lawyers dis-

covered, or pretended to discover, that the old Dower House, which had always been considered as inalienable from the Moore family, could be sold.

It was accordingly sold—principally to pay their own long bill—and it was bought by a very wealthy “statesman” (as landed proprietors are called in Northumberland), Fenwick, of Fenwick Park.

At this time the eldest son of the late Moore, of Moor House, had obtained through the interest of an old friend of his father’s a cadetship in India.

His only brother, my father, had competed for and obtained an open scholarship at Oriel College, Oxford.

The small living of Moordell was to be his if, when he was in orders, it became vacant. If not, a fellowship would naturally follow his scholarship, and a college living be ultimately his.

My uncle, now Moore of Moor House (although that house was let for a lease of years, and he was a cadet in the Indian army) was all calculation, pride, and ambition. My father was all intellect, love, and self-sacrifice. My uncle, the day before he set sail for India, visited the home of his fathers. The family to whom it was let was not expected till the middle of August; it was then early in July. He went alone, although my father, whose loving heart had contrived to attach itself even to his cold, proud, ambitious brother, had wished to accompany him.

My father heard afterwards that his elder brother had stood long gazing with folded arms, pale cheeks, and flashing eyes at the portraits, in the picture gallery, of his warlike forefathers and stately foremothers, whence he had repaired to Moordell churchyard, and frowningly glanced at the humble

headstone which recorded the birth and death of his father.

His visit to that spot was a very brief one, and rapidly he strode thence to Warkworth church. There lay, carved in marble and with his legs crossed, his ancestor, the Crusader, Sir Adam Maure des Maures ; and by his side, Dame Margery his wyfe ; and three sonnes and five daughterres knelt round the couch on which their parents lay.

My uncle's visit to this monument was a very long one. He afterwards told my father that he had knelt down by that marble group, and, kissing Sir Adam's sword, had sworn that he would never return to his native country until he could buy back every farm and forest and fishery—every rood of land by sea and moor—which his father and grandfather had sold, nor until he could afford to live in the home of his fathers as his ancestors had done before him, and

till he could be Moore of the Moors, not only in name, but in reality.

My grandmother did not live long in her small Warkworth lodging; and yet my father worked hard at Oxford, where he had taken high honours, and had become a Fellow of his College, as "coach" or "crammer," in order to surround his mother with every comfort. But pride, family pride, ate like a canker into her heart's core.

She might have lived on, and have been comparatively happy, in the gloomy, secluded, half-ruinous Dower House of the widows of the Moore family.

She could breathe and enjoy the unwholesome air that came in damp and deteriorated through the tangled evergreens and ivy that shrouded the windows.

She could doze in the old high-backed hard chairs or sofas of the Dower House, by the huge cavernous grate, above which were

sculptured in marble the arms of the Moores of the Moors. But in the snug, neat, sunny little sitting-room of her Warkworth lodging, with the gay carpet and bright chintz, its small mantelpiece and small bran-new chimney-glass in its bright little frame covered with yellow gauze, its Pembroke table and sideboard, both veneered and smelling of varnish, she could *not* breathe.

She *could* take a sort of melancholy pleasure in walking through the plantations of dark pines and over the purple moors that belonged to the old Dower House, but she could never bear to show herself, in her altered circumstances, in the one long street of Warkworth. And so she pined and died.

About a year after her death, and about five years after my uncle had set sail for India, the little living of Moordell became vacant, and my uncle, who had inherited the advowson, of course presented his brother.

CHAPTER III.

TWO THAT WERE ONE.

I HAVE heard many of the old, and indeed the middle-aged people of Moordell say that there never was a handsomer or finer, or a more loving couple than my father and mother, when first he brought her home as his bride, and installed her at Moordell Vicarage as its mistress.

In confirmation of this assertion, I have not only my own recollection of those dear forms and faces, bathed in the sunset of memory, and seen through the softening

mist of tears ; but I have before me, on my desk as I write, their miniatures, taken when they were first betrothed. They were painted by a young artist who has since become famous ; and although the costume of both seems quaint and old-fashioned, yet “a sweet young female face of seventeen,” with deep blue eyes full of intellect and love, the bloom of Hebe, a beautiful mouth, and long golden hair in rich profusion, can never be out of fashion. Nor will the time ever come when a high, white, massive brow, dark eyes full of light, noble features, a clear pale complexion, and thick masses of raven hair, added to a tall form of perfect symmetry, will not be recognized as the best type of manly beauty.

When I was a happy child at home, I thought nothing about the intense sympathy, the perfect union, the oneness that existed between my father and mother.

Now that I know how rare a thing it is for *two to be one*,—what struggles for supremacy, what infringements on each other's domain, destroy the peace of many homes, and how often an overbearing husband makes his wife a coward and a trickster, or a jealous, imperious wife converts her husband into a prevaricating poltroon,—I marvel at the recollection of the perfect equality, self-abnegation, and peace, that made our little vicarage the *beau idéal* of a home.

Yes, I have learnt, in my experience of life, to wonder at and glory in the mutual reverence, tenderness, and trust of my dear parents for each other. “He was king of the household, and she was its queen.”

The first thought of my father was not what *he* should like, but what would please my mother; and with my mother, what would give most gratification to my father.

CHAPTER IV.

THE TENANTS OF THE HALL.

I HAVE said that the “Hall of my fathers” was let to a very wealthy Indian merchant, Mr. Hodgson. He used to come down on or about the twelfth of August with a party of gentlemen to shoot grouse, and often Mrs. Hodgson and the young ladies accompanied them.

The Hodgsons thought a great deal of themselves, but they were not much noticed by the old Border families, who attached immense importance to birth and pedigree,

and who preferred in their hearts a ruined Moore of Moordell to any *nouveau riche* and showy *roturier*, whose well-dressed wife and daughters, numerous servants, gay liveries, and fine new equipages, made the ladies of their own families, their rustic-looking servants, quiet liveries, and old-fashioned coaches or chariots, appear so obsolete and shabby.

Mr. Hodgson was very hospitable. Mrs. Hodgson made many pompous, ludicrous efforts to patronize my mother. My father laughed in his own quiet way at the idea of a Mrs. Hodgson's patronizing the wife of a Moore of Moordell.

I was very glad to be invited to the house, to see all the beautiful dresses and trinkets of the Misses Hodgson, and to be feasted with a variety of delicacies and dainties which I had never seen or even heard of before.

There were no very remarkable people in our neighbourhood. Parks, abbeys, priories, villas, and halls abounded; but they were not by any means so near to each other as in the midland and southern counties or in the south-east and west of England. The estates in the north were much more extensive and less cultivated. Their owners were called "statesmen."

It was a coal county too, and that circumstance, while adding much to the wealth and comfort of all classes, took a good deal from the beauty of the country and the neatness of the villages.

The country seats were inhabited by some few of the nobility, and many of the old squirearchy. All were coal masters. In general they lacked something of the refinement of what they called 'the Sooth,' and they were more hospitable, and, I think, less artificial and unreal than those nearer the

great metropolis of the world. They were all singularly alike in their lives, views, manners, and conversation.

Mr. Fenwick, of Fenwick Park (which was one of the finest estates in the county), was certainly an exception, but he was very seldom in the North, and, even when at Fenwick, mixed but very rarely with any of his neighbours.

He was a man of cold, reserved manners, and of a stern, haughty expression of countenance. It was said that his violence of temper, at times, amounted almost to insanity.

He had educated a beautiful little girl whom he had met with in Italy, with the mistaken view of adapting her to be his wife. Her father was a Sicilian, and her mother an Englishwoman. He lodged in their house at Florence, and, as they were poor and he was immensely rich (at least he

seemed so to them), they thought their Lucia very fortunate in the prospect of being one day mistress of Fenwick Park, near Alnwick, and Fenwick House, Berkeley Square.

Lucia was eleven years of age when she was placed at a first-rate boarding-school at Brighton, at Mr. Fenwick's expense.

She was sixteen, and he was fifty-five, when they were married. She had always spent her holidays with him, a governess being provided to keep her to her studies. Even during the vacations, Fenwick of Fenwick always presided at the lessons.

He had taught her to obey him, and to fear him; but he could not teach her to love him.

The marriage was a very unhappy one.

Mr. Fenwick gave up all manly pursuits, to devote himself entirely to the moral, intellectual, and physical training of his hapless young wife.

She was in greater bondage than she had ever been when at school, and was much less happy, for there she had companions of her own age. Now this stern, middle-aged disciplinarian was her only associate; for he shunned society, to devote his whole time to her.

He was perfectly Spartan in his system. Very early hours, cold bathing, and long walks before breakfast in all weathers and all seasons; very plain food,—milk porridge, which she loathed, instead of tea or coffee, which he considered enervating; six hours daily of hard study by his side; no fire in her room, and a very hard mattress to lie upon;—these were his contrivances for strengthening the intellectual, moral, and physical system of his wife.

They had one child, a son and heir, and Fenwick of Fenwick began, while this child was yet an infant, a system as severe as

that which he had adopted with Lucia in her childhood, and which had made him an object of terror to her ever after. Certainly a more miserable being than this young wife did not exist.

She had her sex's natural delight in dress and ornament ; he never allowed her to wear a trinket or jewel of any kind. She loved everything stylish and fashionable, and he loathed the fashion. When hoops and crinoline were universal, he compelled her to dispense with both. He made her wear her hair quite short, that no valuable time might be lost in dressing and adorning it. He gave her no money, and forbade her ever incurring a debt.

He had her plain woollen dresses made after a fashion of his own. For summer wear they were of linen.

He trained his child in the same way.

One day, in a mistaken zeal for the infant's

benefit, he punished it so severely that it was seized with violent convulsions.

What were the mother's feelings when the doctor, whom she sent for at once, shook his head and told her there was little hope of its recovery !

It was in town that this happened.

The next day, the child having rallied, Mr. Fenwick went out on business, and did not come back till the evening. On his return, he sent, in vain, to command the presence of his wife and child. Vainly he rang the bell again and again, as if he would break the very wires.

The servants, who dreaded him, and who knew by his manner of ringing that he was in a violent passion, trembled and grew pale as they listened to his commands to desire Mrs. Fenwick to come to him directly, and to bring his boy with her.

They dreaded some scene of violence for

their kind and gentle mistress, and the beautiful child, who was the pet of the household.

Mrs. Fenwick was, however, nowhere to be found, and the old butler was obliged to summon courage to tell his master that his mistress had not been seen for many hours ; that she had gone out soon after he had left her, and had taken the child with her.

No inquiries in the neighbourhood elicited anything beyond the fact that Mrs. Fenwick and her little boy had been seen early in the day crossing the square.

The wretched man, who, wrong-headed as he was, passionately loved his wife and child, and was very proud and very fond of his son (son and heir), left nothing undone to discover their retreat. He did not disdain to enlist detectives, and to set them to work, but in vain. All they could learn was, that a lady and a child, answering to

the description of Mrs. Fenwick and her little boy, had set sail from Liverpool for Sydney, in a crazy old tub of a ship, called the 'Ocean Queen.'

The 'Ocean Queen,' a fortnight later, went to pieces in a storm, and all hands perished.

Mr. Fenwick went into the deepest mourning, and was seldom seen to smile. Smiling had never been his *forte*, but now he was positively morose.

He very seldom came to Fenwick Park now; but when he did, it was always at night and unexpectedly.

He was a tall, dark, massive-looking man, and about this time his sight became much affected. Ere long he was quite blind of one eye; but this infirmity did not affect the outward appearance of his very large and very light blue eyes.

I remember that he wore a green shade

and used to roam gloomily about the woods, the moors, and the beach, with no guide but a favourite and very surly bulldog and a stick.

Sometimes in my lonely childish rambles I met him, and I always thought there was something weird and mysterious about him. If I espied him in the distance, my heart beat wildly, and I fled like “the moon-eyed herald of dismay !” Then, too, the country people, very superstitious everywhere, and particularly so on the Borders, told strange stories about Fenwick of Fenwick and his ancestors.

He was born, they said, on Good Friday, as his father was before him ; and these simple people believed that those born on Good Friday had powers peculiar to themselves,—that they were gifted with second sight, held converse with the invisible world, and could detect a murderer among thousands.

It was whispered too, that he had had some hand in the disappearance of his wife and child ; but that report my father, who was in London, on business, at the time of their disappearance, and who had been sent for at once by Fenwick of Fenwick, knew to be false.

My father well remembered his anguish when he discovered their flight, and that he had at once employed detectives to try to discover their retreat.

Still, as I had been imbued by my old nurse Bessie with all the dreadful stories current among those of her class about Fenwick of Fenwick, I never saw him without a shudder, and I always ran away if possible whenever I saw his huge form looming in the distance. If I came upon him suddenly in the forest or by the sea, my heart almost ceased to beat, the colour fled from my face, and I hurried past him as swiftly as possible.

Squire Fenwick had a sort of regard for my father. Occasionally, when at Fenwick, he would call and ask him to dinner. My mother and I were always overjoyed to see my dear father safe back again.

My mother never told me she had any dread of Squire Fenwick, but I gathered it from her pallor, her restlessness, and her anxiety she could not conceal, as the hour at which he was expected home drew near.

CHAPTER V.

THE OLD FRENCH COUNT AND THE
ITALIAN SIGNORE.

THERE were two other near neighbours of ours, very interesting to me in themselves, but not men of fortune or estate like Squire Fenwick.

One of these was a very old French Count, Monsieur Alceste de Mortemar. He had come over to our coast with his parents, the stately old Count and Countess de Mortemar, an old English nurse, a native of Warkworth, a snow-white tiny lap-dog of the Countess (a little toy poodle, one ball of

curls), and a beautiful little parroquet, which, at the moment of their escape from the old Castle de Mortemar, near St. Malo (in a fishing smack), had flown into the Countess's bosom, as if aware that he must escape with the noble fugitives or be left behind—perhaps to have his green and gold and scarlet neck wrung by the Sans-culottes, who had sworn to have the Count's head, and were ransacking the Castle just as its noble owners put to sea. Certainly *Mignon*, one of whose dearest and favourite *chefs-d'œuvre* was “*Vive le Roi*,” would have found no mercy at the blood-stained hands of the “*bonnets rouges*.”

The Count and Countess de Mortemar and their son, then about three-and-twenty, had all been high in favour with the ill-fated Louis XVI. and Marie Antoinette, his fair and most unfortunate Queen.

Blanche, the tiny lap-dog of the Countess,

and Mignon, the beautiful parroquet, were both presents of the Queen to her favourite the Countess.

It was entirely owing to the courage and devotion of old Shoozie Anderson, the Countess's English nurse, that the Count, her son, and herself escaped the guillotine.

They reached Alnmouth in a fishing-smack, with whose owner Shoozie had made acquaintance at St. Malo, and by her advice they settled in her native village of Moordell. With the jewels and other valuables which the Count and Countess had contrived to carry off with them, they had been enabled to purchase a quaint old house and garden in Moordell. There the old Count and Countess had lived till extreme old age, and there they had died.

Blanche, the toy poodle, who had become a mother soon after her arrival at Moordell, had preceded her noble mistress to the

grave, but her posterity, snow-white, tiny, and curly as their foremother, were still the boast of Moordell.

Mignon, the dear little parroquet, with the longevity of his race, still survived, "lusty and like to live," as bright in plumage and with as clear and ringing a voice as when Marie Antoinette sent him on a certain New Year's day to her dear Countess in a *bonbonnière*. Still his *refrain* was as of yore, "*Vive le Roi*," and still he was the pride, the pet, and the solace of the only son of the old Count and Countess de Mortemar, who, all noble as he was by birth, had from the first turned his talents to account to assist his parents and to support himself.

The Count Alceste de Mortemar had taught French and fencing for fifty years in the neighbourhood of Moordell.

I had been his pupil in French from my

childhood, and was an especial favourite of the dear old man's.

He was the *beau idéal* of a French nobleman of the old school. His accent was perfect. His manners, albeit a little ceremonious, and his conversation very complimentary, were beyond expression graceful and winning.

He had feelings of the most chivalrous devotion to the Bourbons. But, as ever, when for a time restored to power, they evinced no grateful recollection of the devotion and services of his family. He, after one visit to the Tuileries, returned to Moordell, preferring the cottage where he was respected to a land where he was forgotten and ignored.

One other very interesting inhabitant of "our village" was much esteemed and noticed by my parents for my sake. This was an Italian refugee.

The French Count had been the victim of the tyranny of the mob, that vengeful, blood-thirsty mob which had avenged in a few weeks the feudal oppression of ages.

The Signor Bernardo di Castello was the victim of the tyranny of the King and the then existing government of Naples. He too maintained himself by giving lessons in his own sweet language.

He was a Neapolitan, with large dark eyes, a yellow skin, and very marked features, and he easily instilled into my heart a passionate desire to see Italy trusted, free, and worthy of her grand descent from the old masters of the world.

The French Count and the Italian Signore often met at our table, and were fast friends and good neighbours, though of course they never agreed on politics. Indeed, it was impossible they should do so, since liberalism was associated in the Count's mind with the

Reign of Terror, the red ruffianism of the first French Revolution, and the headless spectres of that good but weak monarch, the sixteenth Louis, and that stately, blooming beauty, Marie Antoinette.

On the other hand, liberalism, for the Signor Bernardo di Castello, meant freedom from the galling shame that all the true sons of Italy felt when, gazing on the fair face of their enchanting land, they remembered that her beauty was but that of a lovely slave asleep in her chains. It meant justice, freedom, honesty, equality, fraternity among the children of one mother; and that mother not cold, scornful, haughty Austria—a step-dame at best,—but a true, loving mother—Italia Unita, the warm, the inspiring, the devoted and beloved.

Who could marvel that the enthusiastic old Bourbonite and the impassioned disciple of Mazzini could never touch on politics

without a conflict? which terrified my gentle mother, but only amused my dear father, who knew that the flushed faces, flashing eyes, raised voices, and clenched fists of the French legitimatist and the Italian liberal did not prevent them being, in cooler moments and on neutral ground, the best of friends. Indeed, on their fête-days, on all the great festivals of the Roman Catholic church, and on New Year's day especially, they would embrace each other fervently, kiss each other on either cheek, and exchange small presents in token of eternal friendship.

As for myself, I was warmly attached to both the Italian Signore and the French Count, and I grew up a political anomaly, for I had feelings of romantic devotion to the cause of legitimacy in France, and liberalism in Italy.

These feelings with regard to Italy were strengthened by the perusal of Silvio Pellico

and many other works written in the same sublime spirit, which I had read in Italian with Signor Bernardo di Castello, and by that of 'Lorenzo Benoni' and 'Dr. Antonio' in English—works which contributed not a little towards the promotion of feelings of strong sympathy in all educated English minds for the glorious cause of Italian liberty and freedom.

Perhaps it is only just to say that they indirectly assisted to engender and to ripen the unparalleled enthusiasm of the ovation which the whole British nation gave to the incarnation of Italian freedom in the picturesque shape of the patriot-soldier, Giuseppe Garibaldi.

At the time of which I write I knew Italy only from the glowing descriptions of Bernardo di Castello and the word-painting of her poets, her novelists, and her historians. Even then I was an enthusiast in her cause.

She was the idol of my fancy then ; now she is the beloved of my heart.

But to my story. Back to the sandy shores of the bleak Northumbria ! Back to the home of my childhood !

Barren and hard-featured, compared to that bride of the sun, fragrant with the orange blossoms that seem to deck her for the altar, sunny and soft Ausonia,—barren and bleak indeed art thou, Northumbria ! save for thy purple moors and thy forests of dark pines ; but yet thou art bathed for me in the rich sunset of memory. And thou, Moordell, nestling in old Coquet Dale, brightened and freshened by the winding river that lends its name to that valley, art spanned to my mind's eye by that rainbow which is formed by memory's sunset shining on tears for departed dear ones, disappointed hopes, and lost loves and joys !

CHAPTER VI.

HARRY BLAKE.

THE French Count lived, as I have said, in an old house at Moordell. His parents had purchased both the quaint many-gabled tenement itself, and the garden in which it stood, with the proceeds of some of the plate and jewels which they had carried away with them from their old château in Brittany. This house had taken their fancy, because there was something about it rather superior to the buildings around it. In truth, although for more than two centuries it had

been let out as two abodes for pitmen and their families, at a more remote period it had been a Manor House. Owing to this, there were some remains of better days about it,—some fine old oak carving over the doorway, and in the largest room. This room, when the Count's father first took a fancy to the house, was divided in two by a wooden partition, which was covered, like the rest of the apartment, with a very cheap, common, and discoloured paper.

The old Count caused the paper to be removed, and the partition to be taken down; and then it appeared that the spacious but low-pitched room was panelled with black oak, and that beams of the same wood, also carved, supported the ceiling.

The huge cavernous fire-place was also discovered to be surrounded by elaborate oak carving, which successive layers of coarse paint had almost concealed.

It was a "labour of love" with the old Count and his son, to restore all the ancient black oak carving; and, by the help of perseverance and a polish of their own invention, every leaf, fruit, flower, bird and nest in the really beautiful carving came out in high relief. The house contained this large apartment, and a kitchen on the ground-floor. There were two bed-rooms and a light closet over the sitting-room, and two smaller chambers over the kitchen.

When the old Count purchased this quaint, antique Manor House, a poor woman named Betty Blake lived in one half of it. The tenants of the other half, a pitman and his two sons, had been recently killed by a terrible coal-mine accident.

Betty Blake was a widow with one daughter; and as she was used to the place, and did not know where to go when the old Count purchased the old Manor House, she

gladly accepted a proposal made to her by the old Count and Countess, the parents of my friend and master, to live rent-free with her daughter in the kitchen and the rooms above it, on condition that they should act as servants, cook, wash, scrub, and wait on the French emigrant family.

The English nurse, who had so bravely and so cleverly contrived to effect their escape, had married, on her return to Moor-dell, a man to whom she had been engaged for twenty years. He was a baker at Aln-wick, and she of course took up her abode there.

At the time of which I am now writing, and when I was about ten years of age, Betty Blake was very old and very infirm.

How well I remember the great delight it used to be to me, to go occasionally to the Count's, to spend an evening, and enjoy the excellent coffee which the dear old man

always made himself! On a birth-day or a fête this was a very great treat. On such occasions he was always in full dress. Mignon was on his shoulder crying "Vive le Roi!"

Several curly snow-white descendants of Blanche la Belle, washed for the occasion and with blue or cherry-coloured ribbons round their necks, slept on the rug or on the chairs and sofas, until he summoned them to dance and beg to amuse me.

Of a very large light closet he had made a sort of oratory. There was a crucifix, a *prie-Dieu*, a *bénitier*, a rosary, and a missal; and there the pious old Count performed his devotions morning and evening. That oratory had been his mother's.

Old Betty's daughter who lived with her had never married, and was a strong, muscular, high-cheekboned spinster, of forty.

Betty had also a grandson, called Harry

Blake, a very interesting, intelligent boy of twelve, who had lived with his grandmother from the age of two.

It seemed that Betty Blake's youngest daughter, Effie, had married, and emigrated with her husband ; and as Harry was too delicate for a long sea-voyage, she had sent him home to her mother, to be taken care of.

CHAPTER VII.

MY FELLOW-STUDENT.

HARRY BLAKE was a great favourite, both with the old French Count and the Italian Signore. The former had known him from his infancy, when he was the golden-headed cherub-pet of the whole household, and when the Count, who doted on pets of all kinds, used to take great delight in making him lisp in French, and in telling him, with national energy and pantomime, all those delightful French fairy-tales, which had been the joy of his own childhood.

It was a very great advantage to Harry to be thus domesticated with one who, having great difficulty in expressing himself in English, and, with national vanity, hating to do anything that he did not do in perfection, took great pains to teach him to speak French, with all his own purity and elegance of pronunciation and construction.

Harry, beginning at that age when the ear and the tongue are so quick and teachable, spoke not only like a little French child, but like a little French nobleman; and it was curious, in a cottage on the Borders, and clad like a little Northumbrian peasant, to hear Harry Blake speak French with the ease and elegance of the Count himself.

Finding him so apt at learning languages, the Signore took Harry in hand, when he came to settle at Moordell; and as every kind of study delighted the thoughtful,

serious boy, he soon became a good Italian scholar.

But French and Italian, elegant and delightful acquirements as they were, could not, as Betty Blake soon found out from my father, contribute towards the great object she had in view, namely, the getting young Harry to a grammar-school, thence as a scholar on the foundation to Oxford or Cambridge, and ultimately into the Church.

Harry had been so delicate in his infancy, and so very difficult to rear, that old Betty had never attempted to put him to work in the fields, to keep birds (as the country people call the keeping birds off the corn), or, like most of the boys in those parts, to work in the coal-mines.

The vicar of a village some ten miles distant from Moordell was the son of an old friend of Betty's. He had been a book-

worm in his childhood, like Harry Blake. He had found friends to help him. He had been sent to college, and ultimately had been presented to a small living; and this was just the career that old Betty wanted for her grandson.

When therefore my father offered to teach Harry Latin, Greek, and the mathematics at our vicarage every day for two hours, and also to let him share the lessons he was giving me, Old Betty was very grateful and very much delighted; and in her exhilaration she incautiously let out that there *was* good blood in Harry's veins, and that he was fit for nothing but to be that mixture of the scholar and the gentleman, which she called a "minister."

Dominie Sampson's mother had felt a similar ambition, and, by stinting herself, had carried her point.

And thus it came to pass that, as children,

Harry Blake and I saw each other every day, and were domesticated together for several hours.

Harry, however, well trained by his old grandmother, who had an almost feudal reverence for what she called "the auld Border bluid" and "the born gentry" of the land, never forgot himself so far as to call me by my Christian name, or to avail himself of my childish advances towards the familiarity so natural between a boy and girl pursuing their studies together.

To Harry I was always "Miss Moore;" and though he was not a pugnacious boy, he once engaged in a battle with a young bully out of a coal-mine, a great deal older and bigger than himself, who ran against me in the village, when I had on a clean white frock, and left several black marks on the snowy muslin.

Luckily, this boy, who was called "Brag-

ging Ben," had not much spirit and had very little muscle. Harry soon compelled him to cry for quarter, and became a village hero in consequence.

CHAPTER VIII.

MY HAPPY CHILDHOOD.

I WAS very, very happy at Moordell. The life I led there would seem, perhaps, very dull and monotonous to me now ; but then I had never lived in a town, I had never been accustomed to excitement, to the pleasures of travelling, to fresh faces, to gay shops, to incident, adventure. I knew none of these. I lived in an atmosphere of quiet love and pleasant duties. I was always occupied. My mother, highly accomplished, taught me to draw, to dance, to sing, to

work. All solid studies I pursued with my father. The Count would perfect me in the French steps, which he had learnt in his boyhood, and displayed at juvenile Court-balls, figuring them in the same gilded *salon* as the hapless Dauphin and the Filia Dolorosa, the poor Duchess d'Angoulême.

The Signore, who had his country's passion and genius for music, made me sing duets with him, and accompanied me on the violoncello, of which noble instrument he was a master indeed. He taught me also to sketch from nature and to paint in oils.

And thus, strange to say, I enjoyed, in that lonely and remote vicarage among the sand-hills and by the German Ocean, advantages of education greater than those for which the Hodgsons paid three hundred per annum, while Miss Araminta Olivia, and Miss Ildefonsa Zenobia, and Miss Margaretta

Ann Hodgson, were located at Hanton House, Hyde Park.

I have said that the affection and the sympathy that united the hearts of my father and mother were of the strongest, the liveliest, and the most lasting nature.

At nineteen she had left the gay, the festive scenes, the London *beau monde*, where she was the reigning beauty, and, led by mighty love, the only love she had ever known, she had settled with my father in the most isolated and remote of Border vicarages, and she had never once regretted the world she had left.

She knew she was very beautiful, and she did not neglect her charms, nor degenerate into a dowdy.

Like Clarissa Harlowe, she was always neatly elegant, or elegantly neat; and, like that paragon of heroines, divine Clarissa, "her things always looked new."

Hydropathy and teetotalism were unknown at Moordell; but my mother was so fond of bathing that my father constructed a bathing-machine for her use and mine, and a caroty pony, whom we called "Rufus," was trained to draw it into the sea for us.

With regard to temperance, without having taken any vows, she practised that virtue; and my father, who had the Borderer's love for his old port and his strong whisky-toddy, could seldom induce her to do more than (as he said) to "sweeten the cup."

Happiness, peace, cleanliness, and temperance tended then to preserve the rare beauty which had won my father's heart, and perhaps contributed much to keep up its devotion.

She was very animated, graceful, and witty too, was that dear mother. Not satirical—that word supposes something bitter—but with a quick sense of the ludicrous, a

fund of genuine humour, and the power, had she chosen to exert it, of being a capital mimie.

She was deeply and unaffectedly religious. Order with her was an instinct, and industry a habit. She managed all money-matters; kept a day-book, and an account of every farthing received or expended; and recorded every evening the *events* (they were such to us) of our happy, peaceful days during my childhood.

CHAPTER IX.

MY FIRST ILLNESS.

I REMEMBER but one sad break in this happy routine, and that was when I was taken dangerously ill. I had caught the scarlet fever. It was of the malignant kind. It was raging at Warkworth, Alnwick, and Alnmouth. The parish doctor, a clever and experienced little man, with a bald head, bright black eyes, and top boots, had owned I was in danger. A great physician from Newcastle, and a greater still from Edinburgh, were summoned to a consulta-

tion with our little parish doctor. My throat was what afflicted and tormented me the most. It was all but closed. I could swallow nothing but liquids; and the great danger was that in a few hours I should not be able to take nourishment even in a liquid form.

At this time I was about twelve years of age, and the weather was very warm; it was the beginning of September, and September on the Borders is of the temperature of August in the south of England.

The two grand doctors looked very grave and ominous while my father and mother were in the room; but when they retired, and the three adjourned to a little morning room of my mother's, opening out of my bed-room, I was shocked to hear them talk lightly of the weather, and joke about politics, and some story afloat about an Alnwick doctor, in the intervals of remarks about my

case, which remarks startled me with the terrible conviction that I must die. They had no idea that the thin wooden partition which divided the two rooms had several crevices, through which their words reached my ears.

In spite of technical expressions, which, however, my knowledge of Latin enabled me to understand, I gathered that unless some very wonderful change took place in the night, owing to some powerful remedy they had prescribed, the next morning, our own medical man, who was a general practitioner, and therefore a surgeon, was to make an incision in the throat.

How hard and cruel it seemed to me, shaking in my little bed as I did at the thought of all that awaited me, to hear them laughing and joking !

Dr. Tweedale, however, as he was called in the village, spoke in a loud voice, and did not join in their merriment.

They went downstairs to partake of some refreshment, and I, getting up in my little bed, looked through a crevice in the wooden partition, and saw Dr. Tweedale with his face buried in his red silk pocket-handkerchief, weeping.

Poor kind old man ! He had brought me into the world. I had always been a great favourite of his. I called to him, and he heard my voice, stifled as it partly was.

“ Dr. Tweedale,” I gasped out, “ I have heard all !”

As I spoke, I threw my arms round his neck as he bent over me, and pressing my hot cheek to his cold round good-humoured face, I found it was wet with tears.

Mine were flowing fast.

“ Oh, Doctor,” I said, gasping and speaking with great effort, “ must I die ? Must I leave my parents, you, the old Count, the Signore, poor Bessie, Harry Blake, and be

screwed down in a coffin like poor little Tommy Trotter was, and be put into the damp earth in Moordell churchyard, there to lie among the worms, and no one to go near me except on Sunday? Oh, Doctor, save me! save me! do not let me die!”

“While there’s life there’s hope, my child,” said the Doctor. “I’ll go and get you this medicine made up. Pray to God, Ada, darling, as I shall do, that it may be blessed to you.”

The old Count and the Signore, undismayed by the infectious nature of my terrible disease, came every hour to inquire after me. They could not rest.

Poor Harry Blake was ill with grief. He sat under a cypress-tree that grew near my window, convulsed with emotion.

The Hodgsons were at Moordell Hall, but Mrs. Hodgson’s dread of the infection was so great, that she (though I believe she felt

for my parents, and was anxious about me) would not let even an out-door servant from the Hall come to the Vicarage to inquire how I was. Still, by the carrier, who passed the Hall gates twice a week, she sent very kind notes and presents of game, hot-house fruit, poultry, flowers, jelly, books to amuse me, and bottles of choice wine.

She would not go to Moordell church, nor would she let any of her family or household appear there. She feared my father, in officiating, might infect the congregation, herself, and the household especially, with my malignant fever.

On the day of the consultation, and after it was known that the great Edinburgh and Newcastle physicians had all but given me over, there was real sorrow in almost every cottage in the village.

The Count and the Signore sat or walked together, often weeping, and calling fre-

quently to ask the tear-blistered Bessie what was the last bulletin.

Bessie, in her passionate grief, sat huddled up in the corner of the old high-backed wooden settle so common in the Border kitchens, with her coarse apron thrown over her head.

Harry Blake was too agitated to study by himself. My father, since my illness, had been unequal to the task of presiding over the studies of the poor boy; and warmly attached as Harry was to every member of our family, he knew not, as I afterwards heard, what to do with the long gloomy hours. When, on timidly inquiring of Dr. Tweedale, for whom he had been long watching, that the two great physicians had little or no hope, Harry, ashamed of the anguish and despair he felt, stood for a few moments after the doctor had left him, trying to stifle his sobs and force back his

tears. Finding the effort vain, he started over the fence and dwarf wall that separated our garden from the sand-hills, and rushing wildly on, on, on, he crossed the purple moors and plunged into the pine forest, there in their dark retreats to hide his grief from every eye. Nor did his distress appear to any one at Moordell to be exaggerated or unaccountable. For many years,—namely, from the time when he was six years old until now that he was sixteen,—he had been in the habit of coming daily to the Vicarage for three hours. Those three hours we had always spent together, and, in spite of the dignified humility of his manners, his reverence and gratitude towards my dear learned father reflected on myself, the freemasonry of the Muses could not but establish a certain gentle rivalry and friendly emulation between a girl and a boy pursuing the same studies, in the same room,

and under the same master, and with only three years difference in their ages. Then, besides the three daily hours of study together, some days of course excepted, Harry, as the only return he could make for the benefit of my father's instruction, would work in my little garden; would go on all errands for my father, my mother, and myself; he would feed my pets, and bring me, no matter at what risk to himself—brave-hearted boy that he was—shells and seaweed from the most dangerous and remote parts of the coast; ferns, fungi, and mosses for my collection; sea-birds' eggs, sought far and near; everything that he thought could interest or delight me, and this of course brought him much into my company. He also, for he had very ready and very clean hands, constructed my aquarium and kept it filled with the strange beings that live in fresh-water. He built

up an aviary for all the birds he had found for me. He studied botany and conchology, to help me to class my plants and shells.

Often, when we were at our meals, my father, who did not think it would be right to ask Betty Blake's grandson to sit down with us, and who yet ranked a lad who could construe Homer, quote Horace, chop logic, and cap verses, speak French like the Count, and Italian like the Signore, far above Bessie and the kitchen, would send me with his luncheon, dinner, or tea into the little summer-house which he had helped to build; and when seated at the rustic table in its centre, Harry, with a book open before him, would enjoy the dainties my dear mother had sent him, and the glass of old port my father had poured out. On such occasions Harry would look and feel intensely happy.

No wonder, that when my illness put a stop at once to our mutual studies and to those pursuits that we looked upon as recreations,—to excursions in search of shells, sea-birds' eggs, seaweeds, water insects, ferns, mosses, wild flowers, and fungi, pebbles and plants,—Harry felt his occupation gone, and gave himself up to despair.

He had cultivated no intimacies with the uneducated boys around him. He could have had no fellowship with them.

The French Count, the Italian Signore, and ourselves, these were the only people he loved and cared for—saving always his old grandmother and her niece, for whom he had a sort of dutiful affection, which, however, did not make their rough manners, illiterate conversation, and Northumbrian accent at all agreeable to his ear, accustomed as it was to the language of our family, to the idiomatic and exquisite French

of the old Count, and to the mellow, musical Italian of the Signore.

I have heard since (for of course at the time I knew nothing of it) that then young Harry in his anguish and his terror at the idea of my danger—my approaching death in short—rushed from our garden, vaulted over the fence, dashed up the sand-hills, across the purple moors, through the forest, and thence down a dark ravine on to the wild sea-shore, which was rosy in the slanting rays of the setting sun, and threw himself in an exhausted and dejected state on a little bed of sand hedged in by rocks.

It was a curious freak of nature, so to scoop out a sort of little couch. In my early childhood, when I used to wander along the coast with my parents or Bessie,—Harry accompanying us to carry the basket in which my shells, my pebbles, and my sea-

weed were deposited,—I had often rested at low water in this marine couch, to which my mother had given the name of “Ada’s Cot.”

CHAPTER X.

ADA'S COT.

WEARIED and breathless with his long and agitated walk of at least two hours, young Harry threw himself down on the soft sand that formed the cushion of “Ada’s Cot”; and the poor grateful youth wept quietly as he thought of all the happy hours he had spent in my company, of all he owed to my dear father—for Harry was a very good scholar and a fair mathematician now; and then he figured to himself the desolation that would darken our bright and

happy home ; and he rose and fell on his knees by the wide sea and with the setting sun shining on his tear-stained face, and he prayed. Comfort and hope seemed to come down into his breast, poor boy, as his prayers ascended to the throne of grace : they were winged by faith, and such prayers are strong. He lay down again when his prayer was finished ; and as for several nights he had not slept, the soft tranquillity of that remote and lonely spot, the half-mournful lullaby of the waves, and the gentle fanning of the sea-breeze, conspired to throw him into a deep, deep sleep ! How long he had slept he did not know, but it must have been many hours.

When, lo ! a hand was laid on his shoulder, a voice sounded in his ear, and its words were, “ Wake, wake, and arise, Harry Blake ; the tide is coming in ; a few minutes more, and you are lost ! ”

Harry started up. The moon was flooding the ocean with silver. The dark translucent azure of the sky was studded with golden stars. The rocks lay in deep shadow. The tide was rolling on, and was almost within reach of "Ada's Cot."

A tall, pale woman in grey, with a hood drawn almost over her face, stood by Harry's side.

"Follow me," she said, clasping his hand with one of icy coldness; "but for the Providence that sent me to rouse you, you must have been drowned in your sleep?"

"I thank you for the interest you have taken in my safety," said Harry; "but if I could *pass* away without committing a crime that admits of no pardon, since it shuts out all repentance, I should be glad to die."

"Why so, Harry Blake?" asked the woman in grey. "What grief can a youth of your age have known, to make death seem desirable?"

“The dark angel hovers over Moordell Vicarage,” he said, bursting into tears. “The vicar, that kind, that learned, that noble-hearted man! Dear, lovely, gentle Mrs. Moore! Oh, they will die! for they will never survive their only child.”

“What ails their daughter?” asked the woman in grey.

“She is dying,” he sobbed out, “of the scarlet fever. She had two new doctors to-day, and they have no hope. I have seen her every day for so many years. We have learnt our lessons and played together, for she has no pride. Oh that I could die to save her life!” By this time they had reached the skirts of the forest that sloped down towards the sea.

“Await me here,” said the woman. “I have a remedy which never yet failed to cure the most malignant scarlet fever. If the doctors have given the poor child up,

her parents will be willing to try it—as drowning men cling to a straw. But no; instead of awaiting me here, go on your way till you come to the large yew-tree at the entrance of the lane leading to the churchyard. I will join you there.”

There was something so ghost-like and mysterious about the tall thin form of the woman in grey. Her face was so pale, her eyes so large and hollow, her hands so thin and white, and her voice so hard and sepulchral, that young Harry felt a thrill of awe as he watched her disappear among the fir-trees. The moon was so bright, and all was so silvery-white outside, and so ebon-black within the forest, that the scene lent a sort of ghostly character to this strange adventure.

Harry was brave, and, for a Border lad, was singularly free from superstition; but even *he* felt his flesh creep at the thought of

meeting this strange being at the entrance of the churchyard.

Still, he said to himself, if she knows of anything that can save or ease the child of my benefactor, shall I let any coward fears of mine prevent their trying it? That strange woman saved my life : but for *her* the tide must have swept me away in my sleep. She is, then, bent on doing good ; I will go at once to the trysting-tree.

Harry was there for about two minutes, resolved, but his young heart beating high and quick, and his eyes turned away from the churchyard, with the very tall white headstones common in Northumberland, when suddenly he felt the cold light hand on his arm, though he had not heard any one approach.

She gave him two phials, and said, “The contents of this one must be rubbed outside the throat ; this is to be taken inwardly ;

but the directions are written on the label of each phial. Lose no time, and spare no effort, no argument, no entreaty ; with God's blessing these remedies will save her."

She turned and glided away.

Harry made the best of his way back to the vicarage.

CHAPTER XI.

THE VISITATION OF THE SICK.

My father and mother were with me when Harry arrived. They had been in my room for an hour or more.

I was very much worse, and my poor father thought it his duty, as a Christian minister, to try to conquer the tempestuous grief of the father and the man, and to read to me the prayers for those for whom there is little hope of recovery.

My mother had already tried to read a chapter from Job, and to pray; but her

convulsive grief quite overcame her, and burying her face on the pillow, close to the burning cheek of her only child.

I was much the calmest of the three. She held the Prayer-book to my father without looking round, and said, "Read the prayers for the sick, husband. Let us pray *for* our child, and with her. You are strong and brave ; I am but a poor faithless coward after all."

As my mother said these words, I pressed my hot lips to her brow, and said, "May God bless and comfort you, my own mamma !"

My father began very bravely, and read through the solemn and beautiful service for "The Visitation of the Sick." (But then he was accustomed to this touching service.)

All went on very well until he came to that beautiful prayer, at the sound of which so many hearts have melted into tears. I

mean that prayer beginning "Hear us, almighty and most merciful God and Saviour;" but when, after the implied possibility and hope of restoration to former health, he came to the heart-breaking alternative, "or else give *her* grace so to take thy visitation, that after this painful life ended, she may dwell with Thee in life everlasting," my poor father's voice was broken by sobs, and my mother, wildly throwing up her arms with an exceeding bitter cry, fell forward on the bed quite senseless.

Of course my father could not continue to pray while she was in this state. He lifted her slight form in his strong arms; he bore her to the half-open window, and Bessie undid her dress, and resorted to all the usual methods to restore her to consciousness.

It was some time before she succeeded. When at length my mother recovered from this death-like and protracted swoon, she

hid her beautiful face on my father's arm and wept.

Then I heard him say to her, "Ada! come what will, you have your husband left. Beware, lest by rebellion to the will of the Father, you provoke him to take me too; am I not more to you than many daughters?"

At this moment, Bessie, who had left the room, came in to say that Harry Blake was below, and begged hard to see "the master and the missus."

"He has brought something to cure missie," said Bessie.

"Poor boy!" said my father. "As if we could venture to give her some old woman's remedy prescribed by Bettie Blake!"

I had been weeping quietly all this time. I sat up then and gasped out, "Papa! Mamma! let me take what Harry has brought. I think it will save me."

“Why not, husband?” sobbed my mother.

“Why not, indeed?” said my father; both meaning, though they could not bring themselves to utter the words, “The great doctors have given her over!”

Poor Dr. Tweeddale, who could not rest, came in just as Harry, pale as death and weeping bitterly, was imploring my parents on his knees to try the remedy sent with such confidence by the mysterious being who had saved him from drowning. She had written on the phials the names and proportions of the drugs which formed the medicine.

One remedy was to be taken inwardly; the other was for outward application.

My father handed the bottles to the doctor. He was far above all professional jealousies and meannesses.

“May do good, and can do no harm,” said the doctor.

“God bless you! Heaven bless you, Dr. Tweedale!” cried young Harry, wild with excitement and joy. “O sir! O madam! you will not hesitate! you will not delay now!”

The outward application and the inward remedy were both administered in the presence of Dr. Tweedale.

He remained with my poor father and mother all night. So did young Harry.

The Count and the Signore called at midnight to inquire after me, and at five in the morning they were again at our door.

By that time a wonderful change for the better had taken place in my state. I had slept soundly. A violent perspiration had succeeded to the consuming fire of that dreadful fever. The swelling of my throat had abated, so that I could swallow without much effort. Dr. Tweedale pronounced me in a fair way to recover. I was able to take

a little nourishment, after which I again fell asleep; and my father, taking my trembling, enraptured mother by the hand, led her away to our little breakfast-room. There, while the sunrise came in golden and red through the clematis and monthly roses, all joined in the earnest thanksgiving which gushed warm and eloquent from his paternal heart.

The old Count was a very devout Roman Catholic, of the old school.

The Signore was also a Romanist, but his creed was tinged with a more questioning liberalism. He was, as so many Italians of the present day are, a Protestant in all but the name, and in his worship of the Virgin and his prayers for the dead.

But all, including young Harry and old Bessie, joined in that fervent thanksgiving for the change already wrought, and in earnest prayers for my entire recovery.

CHAPTER XII.

CONVALESCENCE.

WHEN the two great physicians came the next day, they did not seem as much pleased as they evidently were astonished. But even their amazement they instantly concealed under a cloak of professional impassibility,—attributed the great improvement, which they could not deny, to their own prescriptions,—wrote another, talked of the weather, the Ministry, and the politics of Europe,—and took their leave, carrying away for the second time, a fee which crippled our little household for six months to come.

My convalescence was very gradual and protracted. It was late in the autumn when I was taken ill. It was early spring before Dr. Tweedale allowed me even to take a turn in the garden.

On the Borders there is generally a fortnight of fine warm sunny weather in February. Long black frosts, biting north and east winds, and heavy falls of snow, may, and very often do, follow this foretaste of spring; but, about the middle of the February succeeding my illness, we had the fortnight which Doctor Tweedale had looked forward to, and, with his consent, I was to spend an hour (if equal to the exertion) in the garden I loved so well.

As yet we had had no very cold weather; and in our dear quaint old garden, sheltered by the sand-hills on one side, and by the pine forest on the other, the monthly roses still blossomed; and in certain warm nooks,

on which the noonday sun shone, colonies of beautiful snowdrops had sprung up, and crocuses, golden, mauve, and white, reared their oval cups and dark green spikes. I was much touched when I saw with what care Harry Blake had tended my own flower-garden, and in what blooming beauty and vigorous health were all the plants in my greenhouse. He had contrived an apparatus for warming it; so that it was, in fact, a small conservatory. He had taken such care of my aviary and my aquarium, that neither bird nor water-insect had died. I felt very thankful to the clever, grateful youth, but I had no opportunity of thanking him. He was now seventeen.

There was an open scholarship to be contested for at Oriel College, Oxford. My father, who was an old friend of the Provost of Oriel, had long been expecting to hear that such was the case; and during my

convalescence he had been “coaching” or “cramming” young Harry as vigilantly and zealously as if he had been his own son. Harry, on his side, had studied as if his young life depended on his success. And though he had never seen the inside of a school, nor had any tutor in Latin, Greek, theology, and mathematics but my father, the old Rector of ——, a celebrated scholar, also of Oriel College, Oxford, to whom my father showed Harry’s Latin verses and Greek prose, said that unless scholarship had grown out of his knowledge at Oxford, Harry Blake must be the successful candidate.

Old Betty, his grandmother, who was suspected of having a hoard in some old stocking or other, hidden in the antique Manor House behind a brick in the walls or under a board in the flooring, came forward with money to equip Harry, and furnish him

with funds for his journey. She added, in her broad Border dialect, “that if the laddie acquieeted himsel’ brawly, and came off weel i’ the contest, there was a bit siller ready for any mair expenses that might attend his being weel settled at college, sic as bukes and furniture, and a’ kind o’ belongings, sic as she weel knew her auld Joe, the present Vicar, had been sairly put to it to find the siller for.”

The day of my first walk in the garden after my illness, was the first day of Harry Blake’s examination ; and as I looked around and beheld everywhere some new proof of the poor boy’s grateful devotion to our family ; as I marked the evidences of his persevering, untiring labour, and thought of the fiery ordeal through which he was passing at that moment,—while, unfriended and alone, “no help but in his genius and his God,” he, in a few hours, was deciding his

fate for life,—I could not resist the impulse that led me to kneel down on the moss-grown step of a stone where now a sun-dial stood, but where once the image of St. John had stood ; and an earnest prayer for Harry's success rose from my very heart, while, my nerves weakened by recent illness, the tears fell like rain from my eyes.

There is something inexpressibly touching to the feeling heart in any mutely eloquent proof of interest or care for us in some labour of love effected by the hands of absent friends. What must it be—I thought to myself—if, instead of a short earthly journey, those who have left behind tokens of devotion, their affection to us, were gone on that long dark voyage of which we know nothing but its dark and dreadful first station—the grave ! And if any doubt of our own requital of their affection crosses our minds, and flings the shadow over our hearts, with

what anguish of remorse, and what fever of vain longing, we ponder on their love and our ingratitude !

The dear old Count and the enthusiastic Signore, hearing I was downstairs and in the garden at last, soon found me there, and ere long my father and my mother came to us.

I have, I know not why, a vivid recollection of that bright, sunny day. I suppose we all of us look back occasionally on hours and scenes of our childhood, that seem to us like rosy peaks or glittering islands out of the mists that envelop much that came before and much that followed. I can see, at this moment, the polite old French Count, bowing, hat in hand, before my dear mother. I can see her sweet face ; my father's noble form and dear smile ; the Signore's black eyes, marked features, and impassioned gestures, all congratulating me and each other on my now confirmed re-

covery. And old Bessie !—chancing to look round, I saw her standing at the washhouse door wiping her eyes with her blue checked apron, weeping for joy, but retreating as soon as she was aware that I had seen her.

CHAPTER XIII.

WONDERFUL NEWS.

I REMEMBER that my mother and I sat hand-in-hand in a little arbour on which the noonday sun shone golden and warm. A breeze, redolent of seaweed and exquisitely fresh and exhilarating, came from the dark blue sea, which we could behold not very far off; a spicy fragrance was distilled by the sun from the dark pine forest, and the sweet sound of distant bells floated in the air.

There had been a wedding at Warkworth

that morning, and the sound so dear to the first Napoleon, the sound of distant bells, rejoiced our ears.

My father had left his study, with the paper, which he had been reading when my mother went in to him and gently compelled him to come into the garden, in his hand.

“What news from India, Arthur?” said my mother.

My father had already turned to that part of the paper where Indian news was to be found.

“James is appointed military Governor of Bombay,” said my father, his colour rising and his eyes flashing. “The Queen has made him a baronet for his great services during the late disturbances, and his generous conduct to two Rajahs and a Begum. He is now Sir James Moore.”

“He must have made a very large for-

tune," said the Count in French. "He is unmarried, and has no heir?"

"Only our little girl here," said my father. "My brother told me when we parted, and were both youths in years, 'Arthur, I shall never marry, but you will—all country parsons do. Your child will probably be my heir. If you have only one, I hope it will be a boy; but if not, a girl can marry and make her husband take the name of Moore of Moordell; for I feel I cannot die till I have bought back every acre that belonged to the Moores, when Moore of Moordell was the great man of the Border. What a fine estate to come to your son, Arthur, or to a daughter on the conditions I have named! But you'll most likely have a dozen bold Coquet Dale rangers: all poor parsons have large families.'"

The Count and the Signore dined with us on that day, and drank my health as the heiress of Moordell Hall.

My mother shook her head, and said, "Don't believe in it, Ada. Your uncle is still in the prime of life—only two years older than your father." (My father's age, at the time being, was always for my mother the prime of life. Dear, modest wife that she was, she shifted the prime of life to suit his age. Had he lived to be ninety, ninety would have been the prime of life in her opinion.) "Well, Ada, in a few years he will return a rich nabob, yellow as his guineas perhaps. He will go to Cheltenham, and mothers and daughters will lay their snares. He will be caught, and will bring home a Lady Moore, to do the honours of Moordell."

"I think not," said my father; "but it's just as well that Ada should not make too sure of being an heiress."

"Oh, mamma!" I said, "I have no wish to be an heiress. Wealth could add nothing to my happiness."

“Except the power of doing good, my Ada,” said my father. “I own it would be a great joy to me to see James—Sir James, I beg his pardon—reinstated at Moordell Hall, living there as his ancestors did for so many centuries, all the adjoining country belonging once more to the estate,—Moore of Moordell, as he vowed he would be if he lived to return,—and my little Ada here his heiress.”

“Oh ! when that time comes,” said the Signore fervently, “you will do something, Ada *carissima*, for my dear country, my beautiful Italy.”

“I hope,” said my father, “if these hopes are realized, Ada, there will not be a want unrelieved in the whole range of Coquet Dale, and that you will carry out my poor pious grandmother’s plan for a happy retreat for the widows and orphans of our brave fishermen, and another for those of the not

less brave pitmen, who perish annually from fire-damp and other casualties connected with their dark and perilous career !”

As I listened to those suggestions, I thought it would be a fine thing—a noble thing to be an heiress ; and I began to accustom my mind to the grandeur and the wealth which it seemed likely I should one day possess.

“I will buy poor Harry a beautiful pony,” I thought. “I will build the Count the conservatory he is always longing for. I will do—what will I not do for beautiful Italy !” What an interest I began to take in the thought of a refuge for the widows and orphans of pitmen and fishermen !

CHAPTER XIV.

HARRY BLAKE'S TRIUMPH.

A FEW days after that I have described, Harry Blake, in a very touching and grateful letter to my father, announced that he had come off victor in the arduous competition for the open scholarship. Harry Blake was now a scholar of Oriel College, Oxford. He was to reside at once.

Old Betty, to whom my father conveyed the good news, sent to the Vicarage in the evening, by her daughter, a sum which she begged he would send to Harry, for the

necessary expenses of his installation at Oxford.

My father, who loved Oxford with that tender and yet lively affection, and that deep reverence, which her best sons ever seem to feel for her throughout their after life, and who was himself an Oriel man, resolved to go thither himself to see and congratulate Harry, to introduce him to many of his own old friends now Dons there, and to counsel him as to the outlaying of his old grandmother's very liberal donation.

I sent Harry a painting in oils, painted under the direction of the Signore, and framed by the Count. The subject was Moordell Vicarage.

The Signore sent him a beautiful edition of Tasso; and the Count, one of Racine.

My dear mother sent him a tea-set, with a small silver tea-pot and two silver tea-spoons.

My father went away intending to stay two days, but it was more than a fortnight before we saw his dear face again. Fortunately a neighbouring clergyman was able and willing to take his duty, and had told my father so when he heard of his intended visit to that Alma Mater so dear to them both, for they had been at the University together.

Who that has been educated at Oxford can wonder that my father, who had not been there for more than fifteen years, could scarcely tear himself away from those beautiful haunts, which Time, the great destroyer, seems only to embellish,—the rich florid Gothic of those time-honoured colleges and halls, so rich in historical interest and classic memories, where the bright green of the beautiful trees contrasts with so exquisite a charm with the grey granite of each antique pile?

It was in the early spring when my father paid this visit to Oxford. Every season is beautiful there, but the spring is pre-eminently so.

On account of that very contrast of the young bright verdure, in every lovely variety, with old time-worn grey of the buildings, the colleges and halls have something monastic in their cool and shadowy grandeur ; but the inhabitants are anything but monkish and ascetic in their habits. A cheerful piety, a gentle urbanity, the refinement that classical lore generally gives, the dignity tinged with affability which are engendered by the habit of command, a universal and general appreciation of the good things of this world,—these are the attributes, in general, of the Dons of Oxford. While with regard to the undergraduates, the flower of the youthful manhood of the loftier and wealthier classes fills the fine old

town with joy, and life, and beauty; all that is noblest in form, and handsomest in face, and brightest in intelligence, and foremost in manly exercises, and gayest and most modish in dress, highest in hope, most playful in art, kindest of heart, and merriest of mood, may be seen in the antique streets, the beautiful gardens, and the fair meadows, or on the clear Isis or the Cherwell.

The Rev. Arthur Moore resolved, like Dr. Syntax, to drown his freshness in a pipe of port, and, at every turn, met some familiar face, some warm greeting, some old college chum, whom years had converted into a Don. He had been so popular at Oxford that none would hear of his going away till he had breakfasted, or dined, or wineed, or boated, and talked over old times and hair-breadth escapes from the Proctors and their bulldogs.

The day was not long enough for the feasts it was destined to compass. And the Rev. Arthur Moore, who found a great pleasure in introducing young Harry to all his old haunts and former friends, extended his stay to a fortnight.

My mother, who had never been parted from my father for more than a day or two since their marriage, felt strange and lonely, but we filled up the time with the works necessary for the surprises we were preparing for him.

The old furniture was all to be covered anew with a bright pretty chintz: this was my mother's work and mine. The Signore undertook the cleaning of the pictures; the Count, the gilding of the frames. We turned his old silk dressing-gown, and I dusted all his books and papers, taking care not to displace one; his study-windows were cleaned, the white curtains washed and

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put up again, the carpet beaten. The garden was put in beautiful order by the grateful zeal of a village nurseryman, who had been a drunkard, but whom he had reformed by his preaching; and he had introduced several beautiful plants and flowering shrubs to surprise his reverence on his return.

The lawn was fresh mown, the walks were newly gravelled, the vicarage and the garden were in exquisite order, and love and gratitude had done all the wonders of which we were so proud.

It was now the middle of May, and although, in a general way, the spring in Northumberland is a fortnight or three weeks behind-hand when compared with that in the South of England, yet as we had had a very mild winter the spring was in its prime.

The weather was beautiful and very mild,

and the garden was full of flowers and bright green foliage.

My father was expected home to tea,—a substantial tea, for he was too economical to dine by the way. My mother and I were in a tumult of expectation. There is this advantage in a very quiet country life, that every little domestic incident becomes an important occurrence, as exciting and as delightful, nay, more so, than the most stirring events to the inhabitants of the great world.

And thus the return of my dear father from Oxford, after a fortnight's absence, made more stir and caused more emotion at Moor-dell Vicarage and throughout the hamlet than royal nuptials or a change of dynasty would have done elsewhere.

How well I remember my dear mother on that white day in our calendar! She was still a beautiful woman in the prime of life.

She was dressed in white, and so was I. My father had a passion for white, and nothing became my mother so well.

The Count and the Signore had been with us all the early part of the day, to help us to complete the 'surprises;' but, with that tact which springs at once from the heart and the mind, they had resolved not to be with us when my father arrived, but to drop in to see him later in the evening.

And now they were gone, and everything was ready. Fido was washed and scented, and wore a new collar, which the Count had made for him, and to which I had fastened a white satin bow. Mignon, our splendid Angora cat, a descendant of one the old Countess had brought over with her, was also decorated for this great occasion. Bessie had on a clean white cap and a new dark blue cloth gown, the costume of the Borders. Her honest face shone with joy and yellow soap.

In our low but cheerful little dining-room the tea was set out. A beautiful bouquet of flowers had been sent by a Miss Foster, a bed-ridden old cripple devoted to my father, who read and prayed with her frequently. She had, as is so general on the Borders, a number of beautiful geraniums and other choice flowers in her window-sill. I am certain that to furnish the bouquet she sent us for my father's return, she must have made her niece, who lived with her, pluck off all the blossoms. It was a glorious bouquet, and the gratitude and devotion that it represented added to the brilliancy and fragrance of the flowers.

One of my father's flock had sent a fine spring chicken ; another, some beautiful broccoli. Cream was supplied by a poor old dame who had a cow, and honeycomb by another who kept bees.

At length my mother's car caught the

sound of distant wheels, and I saw her turn pale and red alternately. A minute later and Bessie came to the door and said,

“Missus! Missus! Jock says he hears the floi fra’ the station weel enough. The masther ’ll be here in twa minutes.”

Away ran my mother and I out at the garden gate and down the lane, and there was the fly coming leisurely along, and my father’s head out at the window while he urged the man to make haste, and the driver replied,

“Aweel, aweel, dinna fash yersel’, your reverence, you’re ganging fast enough.”

No sooner did my father see us than he opened the door of the fly, and, rushing towards us, received us in his arms.

What a happy evening it was! How delighted he seemed to be with all we had done to surprise him! How glad he was to see the Count and the Signore; and how he

amused us all with his lively history of all his adventures ! How they enjoyed their whisky punch, of which my mother and I took a few frugal sips out of my father's glass. And how we all joined in chorus when he sang—for he had a beautiful tenor and a fine ear—"Home, sweet home ! there's no place like home ; be it ever so humble, there's no place like home !" And when the Count and the Signore were gone, and we joined as usual in family prayer, how my father's voice trembled with the fervent gratitude of his heart for the mercy that had sent him safe back to his beloved home to find all well there ! I am sure there must have been tears in his eyes, for I heard them in his voice ; and I saw my mother bury her face in her handkerchief ; and, indeed, my own eyes were moist.

We were rather surprised not to see Harry Blake with my father ; but it appeared

that he was to reside at once, and our joy was so great and so complete in our re-union with that best of husbands and of fathers, that we felt as if we had never known how unutterably dear he was to us before that evening.

CHAPTER XV.

THE QUIET FLIGHT OF TIME.

DURING the next years of my life, nothing very remarkable occurred in our happy home. Of course I glided gradually from the child into the woman.

I became more pensive and less joyous. I took less delight in active exercise, and more in solitude, thought, and reading, particularly poetry of the highest order, and such first-rate well-chosen novels and romances as my wise and careful parents put into my hands. But all novels and most

poems treat more or less, and in glowing language, of that master-passion of young hearts—love !

I was now seventeen, and of course I began to identify myself with the heroines about whom I loved to read,—to picture to myself a being on whom to lavish the treasures of tenderness with which my heart o'erflowed, and to pine for a something beyond the quiet joys of our “happy valley.”

Harry Blake had been home only twice since he had left Moordell, and then we were on a visit at the Hodgsons’.

My mother and father did not seem to wish to encourage any intimacy between Harry and me. I did not understand their reason then—of course I do now !

My father continued to correspond with Harry, and to take a lively interest in his progress ; but he never read Harry’s letters aloud to me ; and once, when I proposed to

send him a purse I had knitted for him, he said, "Harry is a man now, Ada, and you are a young woman; of course you will always feel an interest in his welfare; but there can be no intimacy, no intercourse now but of the most distant kind!"

I felt that I blushed "*jusqu'au blanc des yeux*," as the French say; and I grew sad, and shy, and nervous, but I never spoke to my father of Harry again.

About this time, Mr. Fenwick of Fenwick, who had been detained at Fenwick Park by a severe illness, was constantly in the habit of sending for my father.

He was much disturbed in his mind, particularly on religious matters. He had been for some years a great deal broken in the faith in which he had been brought up by pious and rather austere parents, and had imbibed, through an unfortunate intimacy with a fascinating free-thinker, and through

the perusal of a number of brilliant and shallow works of ancient and modern deists, depressing doubts, which, on the bed of pain and possible death, became maddening terrors. My father was exactly the man such a hapless being required. He was more learned and better-read than the brilliant writers who had shaken Mr. Fenwick's faith. He knew all they had written, and was able to refute all their sophisms. To Tom Paine he could oppose Pascal, and, as Mr. Fenwick was very fond of Voltaire, Jean Jacques Rousseau, and others of the same school, silence the glittering Voltaire by the grand voice of Newton, and all minor doubters by the sublime Bossuet and our own divines. He led Fenwick of Fenwick back through the mazes of doubt and the Slough of Despond to the Fountain of Truth and the foot of the Cross.

Mr. Fenwick recovered from the illness

which had endangered his life—a liver complaint, caused by anxiety of mind and morbid remorse. His eyesight was still very seriously affected, and he lived in constant fear of total blindness.

The comfort he derived from my father's presence was unspeakable. And my dear father, much as he loved his home and hated to be away from it, could not resist the earnest, almost passionate entreaties of this strange mysterious being, to stay with him sometimes two or three days at a time.

I heard my father, who never spoke of such matters before me, say once to my mother, in ignorance that I was in the same room, "That poor Fenwick is haunted by the idea that his cruelty caused the death of his wife and child. In his late deliriums he fancied he saw her. What an unfortunate being he is! He loved her and his child to distraction, and yet treated them

so cruelly that they could not live with him.

"I wish he would go back to town," said my mother; "he takes you away so much, Arthur."

"Ada," said my father, "he is one of my flock. You know the good shepherd would give his life for the sheep. To you, as to my second self, I can reveal the secret."

At these words I came out of the inner room. I felt I had no right to listen to a secret confided by my father to my mother. I said, "As you are going to tell Mamma a secret, Papa, I am in honour bound to come forth." My father kissed me tenderly, and said, "A greater wonder than that wonderful woman of Mrs. Centlivre's, who could keep a secret, is our little Ada, whose sense of honour forbids her to overhear one! Go, my child, and tell Bessie to get forward with the dinner, for I must go over to Fenwick Park this evening."

CHAPTER XVI.

FENWICK OF FENWICK.

It was a few days after the conversation I have recorded, that my father announced to my mother that he intended, if she had no objection, to invite Mr. Fenwick to spend a few days at our house. We had a spare room, and though both my mother and I felt a vague kind of mysterious dread of Fenwick of Fenwick, yet we were both glad to think that while he was domesticated with us, we should be spared the intense anxiety which we always felt when my father was at Fenwick Park.

I never knew why my mother was always pale and nervous during my father's stay there. She had never given me any explanation on the subject; and, all gentle as she was, there was a dignity and reserve about her which made it impossible for me to question her on any subject on which she chose to be silent: but of course the secret she made of the cause of her alarm added tenfold to the imitative terror I could not but feel.

"I hope, my love," said my father, "that you and Adie will do all you can—and we know that female art has often made a lucky hit—to cheer and comfort poor Fenwick. He is a very unhappy man; but he is wonderfully well read, and a perfect gentleman."

"Is he not almost blind?" said my mother.

"He has a nervous affection of the eyes,

which at times renders him very nearly blind. At times he sees pretty well."

"Of course, Arthur, Adie and I will do our best to make any one you invite as comfortable as possible."

"He is very fond of music," said my father; "and I think if you and Adie play and sing to him, you will soothe his perturbed spirit. At any rate, he cannot be here more than three or four days, for he is going to London on business at the end of the week. As you make no objection, my love,—and I thank you for your acquiescence, for I know Fenwick is no favourite of yours,—I shall walk over there to-day, for I have to see several cottages on his estate. Fenwick's coachman will drive us back to dinner. Fenwick wants to have his carriage here while he is with us; and as Bessie would be in despair if she had Fenwick's groom quartered on her, and our

stable and coach-house are out of repair, the carriage-horses and groom will put up at the Black Dog."

My father took his leave, after affectionately embracing us both; and my mother and I set ourselves earnestly to work to make those preparations which in so small a household naturally devolve on the ladies of the family. Bessie was not in a very good humour. She was always "put out" by any arrangement that interfered with the routine of our every-day life. She had the irascible Border temper, and a considerable amount of Border satire.

She, too, availed herself of the privilege which old servants always seem to possess of finding fault with their masters and mistresses.

"Aweel, aweel," she said; "what a mon's the vicar! As if it war na enough that he must terrify us poor woman-folk out o' our

senses three or four times a week by ganging over to Fenwick Park; but noo he must e'en bring that ill-fa'red uncanny Fenwick o' Fenwick to his ain ingle nook. It's na canny, and na gude will come of it. Na gude has ever come o' a Fenwick o' Fenwick sitting down wi' a Moore o' Moordell !"

"Bessie," said my mother gently, but with the authority of a mistress, "how often must I forbid you to grumble at anything your master chooses to do? Let me hear no more of these idle clavers, but go to the kitchen at once and begin to get the dinner ready."

"I ken na, Ma'am, wha I'm to get ready."

"I will come down and give the necessary orders," said my mother. "Do you go and see that everything is fit for my inspection."

Bessie said not a word, but went off very red and in a huff. She said nothing till she was, as she fancied, out of hearing, but then

the echoes of her grumblings reached us and made my mother smile; and presently we heard her, as was her custom on such occasions, venting her rage on Rob, the gardener and man of all work, whom she was rating for not having done something she ought to have done herself; and Rob, the 'odd man' at the Vicarage, finding a boy who was employed to weed and go on errands idling in the garden, quitted the irate Bessie to go and vent his rage on little Jack, who, being a lad of mettle, and finding himself roughly handled for nothing, took to his heels and did not reappear all day.

The Count and the Signore called while my mother and I were putting up muslin curtains and otherwise embellishing the room appropriated to Fenwick of Fenwick.

The Count had all the notions relative to marriage of the country of his birth. He thought that every girl of seventeen was a

person to be bestowed on some *bon parti* chosen for her by her parents. He looked upon matrimony as a transfer in which the bride elect was to have no voice; in fact, a *mariage de convenance* was the only sort of marriage which he understood as proper or feasible among people of birth and station. He therefore slyly congratulated my mother and me upon the approaching visit of so rich and important a man.

“We shall see what we shall see,” he said, smiling and bowing low as he kissed my mother’s hand. “*La petite* will make a very fair and gracious *châtelaine*, and I am glad my good friend the vicar is so ready to perform his paternal duties.”

“Oh, Count, indeed you mistake,” said my mother. “Mr. Fenwick’s visit has no reference whatever to Ada. Why, he is old enough to be her father.”

“So much the better!” said the Count.

“ So shall she look up to him, and love, honour, and obey him !”

“ Never, Count !” said I pettishly. “ I would rather die than marry such a man.”

“ Marriage without love !” put in the Signore, “ ah, there is the greatest of modern abuses !”

“ But love will come,” retorted the Count. “ It is in the nature of any good and pure-hearted woman to attach herself to a man she sees every day and all day long, and of whose happiness she is the responsible trustee.”

“ No,” said the Signore, “ she may try to love, but love was never yet born of duty, and never will be !”

“ Count,” said my mother, “ in your country such a man as Fenwick of Fenwick might be selected by the parents of a girl of Ada’s age, as a suitable husband for her, but in England never ; and here, in our uni-

versal freedom, the woman herself has the right of election, and I think no English girl of seventeen would choose such a man as Fenwick of Fenwick."

"Besides," said I, "you are very generously disposing of what is not yours to give, Count. Fenwick of Fenwick is a very melancholy, morose, purblind widower, whom my father has invited here for change of air and scene. He is wedded to the memory of a wife who ran away from him, and, with their only child, both perished on their way to Sydney. You may be sure he has no wish to marry again."

"We shall see—we shall see!" said the Count.

"We shall never see Ada give her hand where she cannot give her heart," said the Signore.

"I hope not," said my mother.

I silently acquiesced in that hope.

CHAPTER XVII.

A BRAW WOOER.

AT six o'clock the beautiful phaeton of Fenwick of Fenwick, with its noble high-stepping glossy greys, driven by my father,—for Mr. Fenwick's sight was too weak for him to be able to drive,—stopped at the Vicarage gate. From behind the drawing-room curtain I contemplated our guest, and shuddered as I thought of the Count's prophecy.

He was very tall—at least two inches taller than my father, who was remarkable for his

height even on the Borders, where great height and manly beauty are very common. The frame of Fenwick of Fenwick was proportioned to his height.

He was not by any means fleshy, but he was large-boned and very muscular. There was stern beauty in his regular features. His hair, which was of a chinchilla colour and immensely thick, rose in spiral curls from his massive brow, and fell on his coat collar in thick curls.

He had very large and very light eyes of a very light hazel, and, though his sight was impaired, they rolled and flashed beneath his projecting black brows. His mouth was well-curved, and had a very decided, resolute expression, and the under lip was very full and very red. His chin was massive.

I fancied that his eyes announced a tendency to insanity, and that his mouth and

chin indicated the cruelty which was said to have driven away his wife.

He spoke sternly and imperiously to the groom, and his voice had in it sounds which made me shudder. This strange and not very welcome visitor was received by my mother with the most amiable and cordial grace. As for myself, he had been an object of mysterious dread to me from my infancy, and when my father said, taking me by the hand, "Here is Ada, sole daughter of my house and heart," I blushed crimson, trembled, and cast down my eyes. I dared not raise them to meet those light orbs and that cruel smile. My mother, who was the perfection of good breeding, and who had moved as a girl in the very first society, exerted herself, in order to please my father, to amuse Mr. Fenwick, and to put him at his ease. She succeeded admirably. There was a sunny warmth in her sweet face and beau-

tiful smile, which thawed the icy glance, the cold, reserved face, of Fenwick of Fenwick. My mother knew many people with whom he was acquainted, and before her marriage had visited at many country seats which were known to him. They had both travelled, too, in France, Italy, and Switzerland.

He was a passionate admirer of the beauties of nature, and he had been in all the quarters of the globe, trying to escape from thought. I recollected, as he described some of his tours, a favourite quotation of the Count's:—

“Malade à la ville, malade à la campagne !

Il monte à cheval pour tromper ses ennemis ;

Le chagrin monte sa croupe et voyage avec lui.”

In the evening, by my mother's invitation, the Count and the Signore came. The Count whispered in my ear many praises of Fenwick, whom he called *un fort bel homme*.

Mr. Fenwick spoke both French and Italian well; and when asked if he sang, owned that he could sing second or take a part in a glee or a quartett. He had in truth a very fine ear and a magnificent voice—the voice of a Lablache.

My mother and I, with the Count, who had a tenor, and Fenwick of Fenwick with his magnificent bass voice, sang several of the finest quartetts in modern operas.

The Count annoyed me a great deal by glances which seemed to congratulate me, and which implied that every advantage Fenwick of Fenwick possessed was a sort of acquisition for which I was to be congratulated. The Signore looked at me rather sadly, as one might do at a voluntary martyr. But Mr. Fenwick exacted constant and undivided attention; and if any of the company failed to pay it, or even attempted anything but listen to him, he grew red with rage and

impatience, and his purblind eyes flashed fire. He was rather pedantic, and wanted to constitute himself a universal preceptor and general censor. At times I thought him a very great bore.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE UNIVERSAL PRECEPTOR.

DURING our guest's stay we took long drives to see objects of interest in remote parts of the county, and I must say that his conversation was rich in anecdote, quotation, and poetry. He had something learned to say about everything.

My dear mother, whose fine mind was so highly cultivated, and whose tastes were so intellectual and refined, found a good deal of interest and pleasure in the conversation of Fenwick of Fenwick.

The Count and the Signore too were delighted with a man who spoke their own languages well, and knew the literature and the history of their countries, and who sympathized with their past sufferings and their present resignation.

I think Mr. Fenwick admired my mother beyond expression, and felt for her the sort of reverential affection and devotion which a knight of old experienced for his queen, or a devotee for some lovely saint.

Of course, had she been single, he would have thrown himself and his fortune at her feet. As it was, he saw in her at once the loveliest and most amiable of women, and the most devoted and virtuous of wives.

Our peaceful, happy, cheerful vicarage, and the pleasant useful life we led, made the thought of the loneliness and gloomy grandeur of Fenwick Park and Fenwick House in Berkeley Square, more than ever

intolerable to him ; and this I think it was, that made him turn his thoughts towards me. I was very like my mother (not to compare to her, of course) ; at least, so all those who had seen her when she came to Moordell as a bride eighteen years before, assured me.

I have remarked that this is the universal opinion expressed of all daughters by those who have known their mothers in their youth ; but I am quite certain that in this case it was just. At any rate, I was sufficiently like my mother to make me dear to those who loved her.

I believe I had her voice, her manner (of course less self-possessed and finished), her golden hair, and her complexion ; but I had my father's black eyes, eyebrows, and lashes ; and instead of the delicate oval of my mother's face, mine was round. Nor were my features so small and chiselled as hers.

I was rather taller, and less delicately moulded.

My mother, though never laid up through illness, was always rather delicate and generally very white. I was very strong and very healthy, and so blooming that my mother used to call me her Border rose.

As Mr. Fenwick seemed to enjoy himself so much in our quiet little home, my father begged him to prolong his stay, which he agreed to almost joyfully, on condition that my father would postpone his visit to town for a week, when he would accompany him and make him welcome at Fenwick House; after which he stipulated that we should spend some time with him at Fenwick Park.

In this invitation he kindly included the dear old Count and the Signore, who, the former with the vivacity of his nature, and the latter with the demonstrative warmth of

his, were in ecstasies at the prospect of this visit.

* * * *

About this time, my father received a letter from my uncle Sir James, announcing his approaching return.

The Hodgsons' lease had nearly expired, and was not to be renewed.

My uncle had already, he said, empowered an agent at Morpeth, who had acted for him before and in whom he had great confidence, to buy back all the farms and lands that had formerly belonged to the Moores of Moordell. And he added, that he had sent him the plans of certain additions and alterations that he intended to have made at Moordell Hall and in the grounds.

When first my dear father read his brother's letter, he was overjoyed at the thought of his return after twenty years of

expatriation. The family pride inherent in his nature made his cheek glow and his heart swell at the thought that his brother would restore, and even add to, the prestige and glory of his house ; that there would be once again a Moore of Moordell ; and that he would be, not a country Squire in very straitened circumstances, with a very long pedigree and a very short purse, ever and anon on the watch to sell this wood and that farm, to let this moor or that right of fishing, as his father, grandfathers, and great-grandfathers had been, but a Moore of Moordell richer than the richest of his ancestors had been, a baronet ever on the watch to buy back every rood of land and every tenement, however remote, which the necessities of his forefathers had compelled them to part with ! These were the fond emotions my father experienced on the perusal of my uncle's letter.

I remember, when it came, we were alone in the breakfast room, waiting for Mr. Fenwick to join us in family prayer.

I can read, as if it were but yesterday, my father's burst of joy, and how he caught my mother and me in his arms, and said, "Thank heaven, there will be a Moore of Moordell again! Oh, wife! oh, child! rejoice with me! Oh that my poor father and mother, Ada, had lived to see this day!" He rested his noble head on my mother's breast, and tears gushed from his eyes!

At this moment, the very heavy foot of Fenwick of Fenwick caused the old stairs to creak and groan. He was coming down.

My father turned to the open window and hastily wiped his eyes, and it was not till late in the day, indeed while dressing for dinner, that my mother told me that, the first proud and joyous excitement over, he had felt not a little wounded and disap-

pointed to find that his brother had not even asked his advice, opinion, or co-operation, but had confided everything to Mr. Robb, the agent at Morpeth, when it would have been so much more natural to have taken counsel with my father, who was on the spot, and who, as Sir James was evidently a confirmed bachelor, had a right to be consulted, since he was of course heir to the property.

I know not why my father never alluded to himself as his brother's heir, but he very often alluded to me as ultimately to be Lady of Moordell,—in short, as heiress to this fine old family property.

Fenwick of Fenwick, on one occasion, when he was joking me about my future grandeur, said, “Excuse me, Moore, but I think you are reckoning without your host. Sir James is not yet sixty, and I think it very likely he may fall a victim, as most

elderly nabobs do, to the beauty of some young husband-hunter, and the blandishments of her mamma. At any rate, it would be a pity were Miss Ada to make sure of a property which she may never possess."

"I quite agree with Mr. Fenwick," said my mother. "I think it more than probable Sir James will some day introduce us to a Lady Moore."

But my father did not, would not believe it. He said he knew his brother well.

"He has no vanity," said my father; "and he is not of a very loving nature. Now most of the old nabobs who fall into the snares, are caught either by the head or the heart. James, very cautious, penetrating, sarcastic, and suspicious, will never believe that a beautiful young girl has fallen in love with him; and if he could be made to believe it, I don't think it would affect him much."

“Time will prove,” said Mr. Fenwick, and the subject was dropped. However, the whole neighbourhood took my father’s view of the matter.

“Sir James Moore,” they said, “was coming home a confirmed old bachelor, and I was to be the heiress of the fine old estate of Moordell, and of all the wealth which, exaggerated to a fabulous amount, my uncle was said to have amassed in India. As this report was coeval with my coming out—that is, my completing my seventeenth year—the attentions and invitations I received far exceeded those generally bestowed on a *débutante*, particularly when that *débutante* is the daughter of a country clergyman.

CHAPTER XIX.

SMITHKIN HODGSON.

THE Hodgsons, whose last autumn at Moordell was drawing to a close, overwhelmed us with invitations and attentions. They had always been kind and neighbourly, but with a touch of condescension in their manner, which, to a Moore of Moordell, was ludicrous as emanating from a Hodgson of St. Swithin's Lane.

It had always been an object of hope and calculation with the Hodgsons, to become, in the end, purchasers of Moordell Hall. They

had rented it for twenty-one years. Several of their children had been born there ; above all, Smithkin Hodgson, their eldest son and heir.

Smithkin Hodgson was handsome and conceited,—in reality very shy, but hiding that uncomfortable feeling under a very off-hand and rather arrogant, insolent, sneering manner. He was his mother's idol, and was very extravagant, and what is commonly called "fast."

These faults caused great quarrels with his father, who was a very careful man. Old Mr. Hodgson was very exact and very honest in his dealings, but rather stingy. He had a religious horror of debt, which he, like Cardinal Richelieu, called "theft."

To hide her son's extravagance and prevent his father from knowing what debts he incurred, poor Mrs. Hodgson stinted herself and her daughters, for whose dress and

pocket money, as well as for her own, Mr. Hodgson made her a tolerably liberal allowance. Mrs. Hodgson was fond of my gentle mother, whom she had known now for so many years ; and she poured into her sympathizing ear, in my presence, all her terrors and her troubles. Even in her lamentations one could see an undercurrent of maternal pride in what she called the *ton* and fine taste of that spendthrift Smithkin. Of course, I never said a word, but I could not avoid hearing the poor mother's half-proud, half-terrified account of how Smithkin had urged—nay, commanded her to get hold of the letter-bag before it fell into his father's hands, in order to abstract any long, blueish, suspicious-looking letters with certain names of well-known jewellers, tailors, glovers, perfumers, etc. etc., on the adhesives. And how he had gone off shooting with a party of gay friends, leaving her, his poor mother,

to the anxious and almost impossible task of getting the bag before Mr. Hodgson (who was always on the look-out for it, being devoured with *ennui* everywhere but in St. Swithin's Lane) should have got hold of it himself.

"Smithkin doesn't consider," said Mrs. Hodgson, who was not a lady by birth or education, "what a pucker he puts me in; I declare I feel like a thief! I've been obliged, on the sly, to get a second key made to the letter-bag, and if Hodgson were to find it out, wouldn't there be a shindy!—a regular blow-up!"

"My dear Mrs. Hodgson," said my mother, "I have known you long enough to be able to take the liberty of a friend, and to venture to speak openly, have I not?"

"Of course you have, my dear Mrs. Moore," said Mrs. Hodgson. "I'm a plain-spoken woman myself, open and above-board

as my dear father and mother were before me ; but Smithkin makes me as watchful as a detective and as sly as a fox. And then, as it's not in my nature to slink about, and play at hide and seek, and fib, and prevaricate, I'm certain I shall let the cat out of the bag some day, and then there'll be a pretty kettle of fish. I declare, yesterday Smithkin had come to my dressing-room at seven in the morning. I heard his step, and stepped out of bed without waking Hodgson. Oh, I'm always on the watch—a regular spy, I am—the more's the shame ;” and the poor fond mother began to cry. “ Well, there was Smithkin, all ready to go out shooting, looking in his new shooting-suit fit to be put into the waxwork or the ‘ Modes de Paris,’ with a colour like a rose. I was as white as a curd, and all of a shiver and a tremble lest Hodgson should wake and overhear us. I'd nothing on but

my night-dress and wrapper,—no stockings or shoes,—and such a cold morning ! My feet were like ice. So says Smithkin, ‘ Mamma, I’m in a regular fix. I must be off to Houghton to shoot, and I’m certain there’ll be several “long blues,” ’ as the witty fellow calls them, ‘ in the letter-bag to-day, and maybe “greetings” from Victoria herself (writs he meant). If the governor opens the bag, there’ll be no end of row. So you’d better dress yourself at once, and go to the little wood beyond the lodge, and hide up there till the post-man passes, then take the bag from him, open it and take out any letters directed to me ; and if there are any to the governor with Roemaster and Rake, or Fleece and Flinch, or Hunter and Haveluck on the seal, bag them, there’s a good mammy. If you don’t, it’s all up with your poor Smithykinny boy ; and it must be either a case of pop’—and he went

as if holding a pistol to his head, and made a sound like its going off with his tongue—‘or that,’ and he shammed hanging himself. ‘Hallo ! there’s my drag ! Good bye, mammy. You’re a regular brick. Don’t let the grass grow under your feet. I hear the relieving officer’s harmonious snore. I’m off,—*au revoir*.’ I could have cried, my dear Mrs. Moore, I could ; and yet, what could I do ? I was numbed with cold ; it had been raining all night, and there was an east wind blowing fit to tear the hair off my head.”

“Poor Mrs. Hodgson !” said my mother. “Did you really go to the little wood, in such a morning ? Why, it’s two miles from the Hall.”

“I did, indeed, Mrs. Moore ; and for fear Hodgson should get up and see me from the bed-room windows, I had to go round by the back lane, almost knee-deep

in mud, and across the moor, where the wind suddenly made a grab at my hat, and tore that and—I don't mind you, my dear Mrs. Moore—my wig away. And there was I, with my head as bald as the back of your hand, chasing my hat and wig, both of which, as ill luck would have it, were carried, the one to the top of a fir-tree,—that was the wig,—the other to the middle of the Coquet,—that was my garden-hat,—where it went sailing down the stream, with the red ribbons blowing in the gale like the flag of a pleasure boat.”

“What a dreadful state to be in!” said my mother, suppressing her laughter; I was convulsed with mine.

“Ah! so you may well say!” cried Mrs. Hodgson. “Well, I knew I couldn't climb a tree or ford a river; so, thinking only of poor Smithkin's danger, I went on, and got to the little wood at last. I had tied my

pocket-handkerchief over my head, and I dare say I looked very queer, for when I saw the postman at last, and scrambled through the hedge to intercept him, he first gave a great start, and then burst into a loud fit of laughter. I am sure he thought I was gone mad.—He knows me very well, and many a half-crown of mine has he had for giving me the letter-bag on the sly; but this time he wasn't at all willing, of course thinking me touched in the upper story. I was obliged to give him five shillings before I could get the bag; but it was very lucky I *did* get it;—there were several duns' letters, a County Court summons, and a writ. Wasn't it lucky I got hold of it?"

"I am not sure of that," said Mrs. Moore, "but what did you do about your hat and—wig?" said my mother, with a little hesitation at pronouncing the word 'wig.'

"Speak out, my dear," said Mrs. Hodgson;

“ don’t make two bites of a cherry. A wig’s a wig ; but mine, as I looked up at it on my way home, looked for all the world like a rook’s nest. Well, I found a boy—I suspect he was a poacher,—but, poacher or not, I was very glad to see him,—for one sixpence he ran up the tree like a squirrel and brought me my wig, and for another sixpence he forded the Coquet and found my hat stuck on an angle of rock. I had just put on my wig when who should I see coming towards me but Hodgson !

“ ‘ Whatever brings you out in such a wind and at such an hour, Meriar ? ’ he said.

“ ‘ A headache,’ I answered, hating myself for the fib : but what could I do or say without letting the cat out of the bag ? ‘ I thought the morning air would do me good,’ I added, ‘ but the wind carried away my hat.’ (I never mention my wig to him. I suppose he knows it’s a wig, but we never

talk of it.) ‘Oh, by the bye,’ I said, ‘I met the postman and took the letter-bag from him,’ and I handed it to him from beneath my cloak. I had taken out Smithkin’s letters and locked it again.

“ ‘I came out to see what was keeping the postman,’ he said. ‘I expect important letters.’ He opened the bag and took out several.

“ ‘My love,’ he said, ‘I’m in hopes Smithkin has turned over a new leaf. He seems to have no duns’ or lawyers’ letters such as he used to have. If I could feel certain that he had sown his wild oats, I’d double his allowance, and perhaps take him into partnership; but that would be ruin if he were likely to begin again and go on as he did last year.’ ”

“Oh! what *did* you say?—what *could* you say?” cried my mother with tears in her eyes.

“ I was too agitated to say anything,” replied Mrs. Hodgson, “ and I’m in a regular fix !—

“ I got home, leaving Hodgson to read his letters and papers in the Park ; and I was so worn out, chilled, and excited, that when I got into my own room I went off into a regular fit. I s’pose fine ladies and novel-writers would call it historical, but I call it having a regular good cry. Well, when I got a little eased, and had prayed on my bended knees to be forgiven all the fibs I’d told Hodgson, it came into my mind to slip out quietly and come and talk the matter over with you, Mrs. Moore. You are a wife and a mother, and I’ve always thought you not only a lady bred and born, but a good Christian, so I’m come to ask you what you would do in my place.”

“ What I fear you will not have courage to do,” said my mother. “ I would not de-

ceive a good husband for—" She paused. She was so kind and gentle she did not like to say for a bad son, so she added "for so extravagant a young man as Mr. Smithkin Hodgson. I would say to the young gentleman that nothing should induce me to be a party to his guilt."

"Oh, don't call it guilt, Mrs. Moore," said Mrs. Hodgson; "say his imprudence, his extravagance, his folly, if you will, but guilt *is* too harsh a word."

"Not in my opinion," said my mother. "See what misery he causes you. Don't be angry when I say that his selfishness imperils both your body and soul. Suppose it were not your own son's, but mine or any other friend's, and you heard that any other young man you like to name went out shooting with gay friends and terrified his poor mother, by threats of suicide, into doing what you have done this morning. And then think

of the false position in which it places you ! Do be advised in time, or you may be led on by degrees to steps that will end in Mr. Hodgson's taking Mr. Smithkin into partnership ; and a partner who has no principle (don't be angry, I speak plainly because you are in great peril), a partner without principle could ruin even so wealthy a man as Mr. Hodgson."

"But how can I tell him?—how can I betray poor Smithkin, who has trusted me?"

"No, you cannot do that, of course," said my mother, "but you can tell your son that you will no longer connive at his deceiving his father. You can insist on his owning the state of his affairs. And Mr. Hodgson, however angry he may be, *must* enable him to settle them, and must allow him enough to live upon. Sooner or later the whole truth will come out, and Mr. Hodgson's confidence in you will be entirely

destroyed. If he discovers that you have deceived him, particularly into a belief that his son was reformed and that he might safely take him into partnership, he would never love or trust you again. He would be justified in separating from you.

“Our children are very near and very dear to us,” added my mother, but a good husband is nearer and dearer still. Yours, Mrs. Hodgson, is one of the best of husbands. Do you remember the words of the solemn promises and vows you made at the altar?”

“Oh!” said Mrs. Hodgson, much afflicted, “I know they were very solemn, but I can’t call them to mind just now—it’s so long ago.”

“Dear Mrs. Hodgson,” said my mother, “from my heart I pity you, but I cannot, as I feared, do anything but urge you to be firm with your son, and a true and loyal

wife to your husband. Any other policy is a crooked one, and must end in misery."

"Oh dear! oh dear!" cried poor Mrs. Hodgson, wringing her hands, "how can I do it? And if Smithkin should shoot or hang himself!"

"There is no fear of that," said my mother; "he is of sound mind; and my firm belief is that no one of sound mind ever does or ever can commit suicide. Besides, if you will but look at things as they are, you will see that from the very first the love of self has been your son's ruling passion. He would sacrifice father, mother, sisters, any one, but he will take care of himself. His troubles do not touch my heart much; but I could weep," said my mother, "over his poor father's false hopes of his reform, and generous intentions in his favour. There is the affecting part of the drama! Oh, Mrs. Hodgson, be advised!

Your son has youth, health, high spirits, many friends, and no troubles but those he brings upon himself,—no love, no care but for himself. Your husband is growing old. After a life of industry and self-denial, he seeks his pleasure in his home. He has nothing but you. You are the trustee of his happiness. Oh, never betray that trust !”

Mrs. Hodgson was still wringing her hands and saying, “What shall I do? what shall I do?” when a carriage stopped at the gate, and visitors were announced. She instantly lowered her veil, and rising, begged to be allowed to go out at the glass-door into the garden, that had a gate that opened on the moor.

“Poor Mrs. Hodgson !” said my mother ; “she has not moral courage to refuse what is, in fact, treachery to her husband, and co-operation in her son’s ruin ; nay, perhaps, the ruin of the whole family.”

CHAPTER XX.

THE DUKE AND DUCHESS.

THE visitors who were shown in on Mrs. Hodson's departure were the Duke and Duchess of Northland, the greatest of the great people of the place. They had always paid us every possible attention. Had we been the Moores of Moordell, living in our ancestral hall, and the important landowners our predecessors had been, the Duke and her most graceful and gracious Grace could not have been more kind and cordial.

On this occasion she was accompanied by

a very interesting, pretty person, four years older than myself, Lady Beatrice Eden. She was the Duchess's cousin. There was something very delicate and almost ethereal in the appearance of Lady Beatrice. Her Grace took an opportunity of telling my mother that there was great reason to fear she was consumptive, as her two eldest sisters, now no more, had been ; and that it was in contemplation, if possible, to send her to winter in the South, or at Madeira. Poor child ! her complexion reminded one of white porcelain, and her cough was frequent.

We were always remembered, and very liberally too, in the venison and the shooting season. My father and mother were always invited to all parties of importance given at the Castle. The Duke and Duchess were kind to all their neighbours, but especially so to the clergy. The Duke, a very learned scientific man, had a great regard

for my father. The Duchess, a beautiful, accomplished woman, liked and appreciated my gentle mother. They came now to congratulate us on the approaching return of my uncle, Sir James,—on his resumption of his own hall and estates,—on the restoration, in fact, in the county of the old *prestige* of Moore of Moordell.

While my mother conversed with the Duke and the Duchess, I was very much engrossed by my interesting young visitor, Lady Beatrice. With the freemasonry of early youth, we had become suddenly intimate. She went with me into the garden. She saw my aviary and my aquarium, my flowers, and my pets. She told me she was now that lonely thing, an only child. Motherless too! And then she said suddenly, “How I wish you were my sister! I should be so happy with you!”

Bessie came out to tell us the Duke and

Duchess were going, and we hurried back. We found them however still seated, and informing my mother that they intended to give a ball on that day fortnight, and that they hoped the heiress of Moordell Hall would make her *début* there.

“You will have your formal invitations to-morrow, my dear Mrs. Moore,” said the Duchess; “but I want to hear you say you will come, as I feel a great interest in all *débutantes* at their first ball, and an especial one in your dear Ada’s.”

My mother, of course, accepted the invitation with all due acknowledgments, and I, with many blushes, and anticipations that far outstripped any possible reality. I was in an inward tumult. My first ball! And such a ball as a ball at the Castle was sure to be! What should I wear? How should my hair be dressed? How should I feel, entering a ball-room for the first time? How

should I even have courage to dance, or to speak, or to do anything?

The Duchess had very graciously said to my mother, "If you have any friend not on my visiting list, whom, as it is Miss Moore's *début*, you wish invited, let me have their names, and they shall have invitations. This is, you know, the first ball given at the Castle since our abode there. The late Duke and Duchess never gave balls—at least not after he became an invalid."

My mother acknowledged the Duchess's kindness with thanks; and knowing how ardently the Hodgsons desired to be admitted to the Castle—an honour they had never enjoyed—she asked for invitations for them, for the Count, and the Signore. Very graciously the Duchess granted the request. She took down the names of the Hodgsons, and of Smithkin Hodgson, and as she did so said—

“I don’t know these people at all, Mrs. Moore ; but as you wish it, they shall have invitations. As for the dear old Count, I shall be rejoiced to see that fine old specimen of a race now almost extinct—the French nobleman ; and as the Duke and I sympathize passionately with the true patriots of Italy, you may be sure the Signore will be welcome at the Castle.”

The Ducal party then took their leave ; and I began to talk with my dear mother of the subject uppermost in my mind—my first ball-dress !

How impossible it seems to me now to realize the intense anxiety and interest which I can yet remember to have felt in talking over the relative merits of gauze, crape, tulle, tarlatan, and net—all white, of course ; and in passing in review all the white flowers which would best adorn my hair and my dress, from camellias, roses,

and garden lilies, down to jasmine and daisies!

The next day we were to go to a dinner-party at the Hodgsons', and as I knew that by that time they would have received their invitations, I looked forward with great pleasure to talking over balls and ball-dresses with the Misses Hodgson.

I remember my dear father said, when I came down, ready to depart for the Hodgsons', in a white muslin dress trimmed with blue ribbons, and blue ribbons in my hair,—

“If Ada looks as well at her first ball as she does this evening, I shall be quite satisfied; but, generally, the more anxious young ladies are about their appearance, and the more pains they take with their dress, the worse they look.”

“I don't think that will be the case with Ada!” said my mother. “She will wear

nothing but white, which will be none the less becoming for being elegant and fresh, and made in the last new fashion."

"I will tell you," said my father, smiling, "what, in my opinion, generally spoils the appearance of ladies when they are most eager to look their best: a hard corset is summoned to their aid, and as they tighten it with a heroism which, in a good cause, would entitle them to take rank as martyrs, they not only, in my opinion, destroy the beautiful form inherited from Eve herself, but they sacrifice the beauty of the 'human face divine' to a wasp-like waist, and the compression not only gives a distressed look to the countenance, but it sends the blood that should paint the cheeks to the nose; and a plain girl, with a white nose and at ease in her corset and her mind, looks prettier than a beauty in tight stays and with a red nose!"

As I listened to my father, I altered my mind about a new pair of very tight Paris-wove stays which the Alnwick dress-maker had almost persuaded me to order.

“One other reason,” added my father, “why women generally look their worst when they wish to look their best is, that on such important occasions as a first Drawing-room, a first ball, or a wedding-day, they submit their hair to the hands and taste of a man who knows, perhaps, what is fashionable, but has no sense of the picturesque or the becoming,—who strains it so tightly that his victims cannot turn their heads with ease—destroys its lustre with his washes, pomades, oils, and creams, and whose highest object is attained if he succeeds in making it look like a wig. I do hope that no hands but your mother’s and your own will touch your golden tresses

for the Castle ball, Ada ! If your hair looks as it does now, and your waist is no more compressed than it is in that blue sash, you will do very well, and I shall be proud of my little girl !”

CHAPTER XXI.

LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT.

It was a large dinner-party at the Hodgsons'—not that they were visited by the most exclusive of the “statesmen” of our aristocratic county, but the smaller gentry, the clergy, and the families of professional men living in Warkworth and Alnwick.

The Vicar of Moordell and his wife and daughter, with their £300 per annum, were invited and welcomed by all the nobility and higher gentry, because they were of the old Border family of Moore of Moordell;

and the Hodgsons, with their £10,000 per annum, were excluded because they were South country parvenus, who had made their money by indigo.

The Hodgsons gave very handsome dinners, and their plate, glass, and china were literally superb. Everything in their establishment was perhaps a little overdone and heavy. Wealth without taste was perceptible throughout. The girls wore rich silks, satins, and velvets, and were adorned with jewels, where muslins, ribbons, and flowers would have been more suitable and more becoming.

The elegant *dîner à la Russe*, so great an improvement on the heavy, hot, oppressive, and interminable banquets it has superseded, was not adopted at the Hodgsons'. They could not give up displaying their massive, richly embossed silver covers, side dishes, and other gorgeous articles of plate. Mrs. Hodgson always said, "Give me turtle soup

in a silver tureen and silver soup-plates with hot water ones beneath, and a haunch of venison in a lordly dish, and a fine biled turkey opposite in another. Let me see my table covered with silver; I don't want no piles of artificial between me and my opposite neighbour, and little scraps of I don't know what handed round from a side table, and whisked away if I do but stop to drink a draught of ale. As I say to the girls, flowers are all very well for those who've no pearls, but they're poor trumpery things after all; and if the value of any given thing is just as much as it will bring, why, flowers wouldn't be worth the trouble of carrying them!"

The dinner party on the day in question was, as usual, large and rather heavy. The Hodgsons had some friends staying in the house. There were two vicars and their wives from adjoining parishes, and a soli-

citor and medical man, both from Warkworth and Alnwick; but the lion of the evening was Mr. Rosecommon Lyall. Miss Margaretta Ann Hodgson told me he was a very great lion in the London world of fashion,—that he was a poet, a novelist, a painter, a musician, a keen sportsman, and, to wind up all, “very fast.” I saw by the manner in which she spoke of him that she was more than half in love with him, and I was sorry, for her sake, when by Mrs. Hodgson’s command he took me in to dinner.

He certainly was in appearance very interesting, elegant, and handsome. He had very dark eyes, very white teeth, a very pale complexion, wavy jet-black hair, and the most beautiful hand I had ever seen. I was dazzled by his wit, instructed and excited by his eloquence, and captivated by the noble sentiments which seemed almost against his will to drop from his lips, as

if to atone for some sparkling sarcasm or worldly epigram.

Mr. Roscommon Lyall spoke in a very low voice, and his very caustic, witty comments on some of the guests were uttered so as to reach no ear but mine. He thus, in a manner, took me into his confidence, and I felt flattered that he did so. He won my heart by the admiration he expressed of the beauty and elegance of my mother. He asked me who she was. It was no marvel to me that he did not know her, for he was a stranger at Moordell, and he was not in the drawing-room when we were announced. He also singled out my father as a noble-looking, intellectual man, who must be a somebody. These were the only persons at table at whom his wit did not aim a diamond shaft or two, and whom he did not succeed in making very ridiculous in my eyes. Smithkin Hodgson he especially delighted to ridicule and quiz.

I ventured to say, "I thought he was your great friend?"

"I might reply by begging you, as our kind hostess would express it, not to put such a *label* upon me," he retorted. "What have you seen in me, to make you think I can sympathize with vulgarity, purse-pride, vanity, and pretension?"

"I have seen you," I said, "a guest at his father's house and table, and as I do not suppose you are here as Mr. Hodgson's friend, I presume you must be his son's."

Much as I admired this London lion's person, manners, and wit, I was rather annoyed at his ridiculing the people of whose hospitality he was availing himself, and I summoned courage to aim a slight reproof.

He was silent for a moment, then looked earnestly at me, compelling me, by his fixed and almost reproachful gaze, to cast down my eyes. At length he said—

“Don’t judge of me by the thoughtless things I have said to make you smile. I am not at all intimate with the Hodgsons, and I have only accepted Smithkin’s ‘soup-ticket,’ as he called it, because I was told I should meet here a person I once saw for a moment in Alnwick, passing the windows of the coffee-room at the Swan, when I was breakfasting there, and to see whom I would have gone barefoot across Europe.”

“And after all,” I said, “that person is not here, and you have cast your pearls before swine, who, if they knew all, would turn again and rend you.”

“Who is satirical now?” said Mr. Roscommon Lyall. “And how do you know that the person I alluded to is *not* here?”

“I cannot think that any of those you have so cleverly satirized, can have inspired in you by one glance so ardent a desire to for a meeting that you would perform such

a pilgrimage as you allude to, in order to ensure it."

Mr. Roscommon Lyall smiled. I felt a great wish to know who the person was in whom he felt so great an interest, but I was too shy to ask him, and the next topic started was the coming ball.

Smithkin Hodgson was sitting opposite to me. He was very proud of his invitation to the Castle ball, and had no idea that we had had anything to do with the honour conferred on him.

He asked me across the table whether I was going to the Duchess's ball on the 15th. I said, "Yes."

At this moment some one required some of a dish before him, and he was obliged to help it.

Mr. Roscommon Lyall then said in a very low voice to me, "That question of Smithkin Hodgson's is preparatory to asking you to

dance the first dance with him. Let me beg you to promise me the first quadrille, waltz, polka, and mazurka ; for the others, I, who know all the best men, will bring you partners ; but don't, pray don't dance with Smithkin. You have no idea how absurdly he canvasses for a ball ; I should be so grieved to see *you* in any way mixed up with his vulgarity. Don't promise to dance with him ; I implore you, don't."

I was amused at his earnestness, and flattered by it too.

Presently Smithkin said, "Miss Moore, may I have the pleasure of engaging you for the first dance at the Castle ball ?"

Mr. Roscommon Lyall looked at me, as if his fate hung in my answer.

"Thank you," I said, "but I am engaged."

"The next, then ?" said Smithkin.

"I am engaged for that too !"

“For any others?” asked Smithkin, turning red and looking defiant.

“Yes, for several. I don’t think I have one dance at my disposal.”

He turned to a lady by him, and asked her ; and I heard him say, “There’s as good fish in the sea as ever were caught.”

Roscommon Lyall, in a very loud tone, said, “Thank you ! You can never know how grateful I feel to you.”

The earnestness of his manner made me blush and tremble. Why should he care with whom I danced ? Who was the person he had seen in Alnwick, and so longed to see again ? Vanity suggested that it might be myself, but the next moment I was ashamed of my own conceit.

When the ladies left the dining-room for the drawing-room, the echoes of his loud, earnest voice haunted me, and so did the expression of his dark eyes.

Margaretta Ann came and sat by me, in order to talk of Mr. Roscommon Lyall. From her I heard that there was some mystery about his birth,—that he was related to Mr. Fenwick of Fenwick,—she thought that gentleman was his uncle, and that he would be his heir ; but she fancied, from something Smithkin had said, that he had noble blood in his veins.

“He talks of getting into Parliament,” she added. “I am sure he would speak better than any of them,” she said.

I was young and romantic enough to like him all the better for the mystery she alluded to. I began to watch the door with interest and a flutter at my heart, and I had to seem absorbed by some engravings on the table before me, to hide the blushes that burned my cheeks at his approach. I had often heard of love at first sight, and I now began to understand that there may be a

mystic sympathy, a sudden interest, in the heart of a young girl for a person of whom she knows nothing, which, if the chances of life ultimately promote a union, will be remembered as love at first sight.

Mr. Rosecommon Lyall sat down by me, and turning over the engravings, which were views in Italy and the South of France, he, who it seemed had been in all these lovely scenes, began to describe them to me in glowing language. I would have listened to him all night, but Mrs. Hodgson came to beg him to sing, and he complied at once; no affectation, no delay, no pretended cold. His voice was exquisite in tone and highly cultivated.

As Mrs. Hodgson was very fond of music, and never lost an opportunity of making me sing, she compelled me to stand near to the piano, and to join Mr. Rosecommon Lyall in some Italian duets. What expression

he threw into the words of passionate love, of which I had never felt the true meaning before, and how my voice trembled and how my colour came and went when I had to call him '*mio ben,*' and to sing '*t'amo.*'

We were standing side by side. Miss Hodgson was accompanying us, when some one asked him to sing "*A te, O cara.*"

His dark eyes, eloquent as his voice, made of that exquisite song a confession of passionate love.

Foolish, rash, and romantic child that I was—knowing nothing of this stranger, ignorant of his principles, his antecedents, his character, his temper, I loved him already with that wild mystic emotional feeling which no one can feel twice; and I, who had always laughed at the idea of love at first sight as a romantic delusion, found by my own experience that it was an enchanting reality.

After the music dancing was proposed. Mrs. Hodgson had a great delight in seeing young people happy.

Smithkin Hodgson, offended, did not ask me to dance. Roscommon Lyall was my partner.

We only danced one quadrille and a waltz, but he found an opportunity to beg me to introduce him to my parents. This I did, and my father, always courteous and hospitable, said he should be happy to see him at the Vicarage.

The evening was over. He offered me his arm to see me to the carriage. The carriage!—it was the shabby old Warkworth fly!

For the first time in my life I felt a paltry shame, and blushed to think that *he* should hand *me* into that humble conveyance.

I was silent as we drove home. I had so much to think of. Every word, look, tone,

and sigh, and that almost imperceptible pressure of my hand when it had met his in the dance,—so light that, but for the impassioned gaze that accompanied it, it would have been only a doubt.

“What makes you so silent, Ada?” said my father. “Have you spent a dull evening?”

“Dull! Oh no, Papa, — a delightful evening.”

“Indeed!” said my mother. “Well, I did find it rather dull, but the Hodgsons’ parties always are rather heavy; and then I was *so* grieved to see poor old Mr. Hodgson so affectionate to his son, for from a few words that passed I discovered that Mrs. Hodgson has not followed my advice. I do believe her devotion to Smithkin is such, she will let his father take him into partnership, believing him to be reformed; and I much fear that, extravagant and un-

principled as he is, he may ruin the good old man."

My father was full of sympathy when he heard this, but I was so entirely under the influence of the most selfish and absorbing of passions that I only uttered a few commonplaces of pity and concern, for at that moment the breaking of the old firm of Hodgson and Birne would scarcely have affected me, unless Roscommon Lyall had been in some way or other connected with it.

"By the bye, Ada," said my father, "who was that gentleman who paid you so much attention? Mr. Roscommon Lyall, did you say? I never heard of him before. He is a very elegant, gentlemanly person. Who is he?"

Glowing with pride at my father's praise of my idol, I said—

"Margaretta Ann told me, Papa, that he is quite a lion in London society. He is a

poet, a novelist, a painter, a musician, an *élégant* who sets fashions, a sporting man—in short, everything. She said he has a good fortune, she believes, and is of a very good family, but that there is some mystery about him. She thinks he will turn out to be a nobleman.”

“A mystery! I don’t like mysteries,” said my father. “In my experience, Ada, cloaks are more frequently used to conceal a rent than a star.”

“Oh, Papa! I am certain Mr. Roscommon Lyall has nothing disgraceful to conceal,” I said very warmly. “He has the noblest sentiments.”

“Ah,” said my father, laughing, “so had Joseph Surface.”

“He sings exquisitely,” said my mother, “and he is certainly a very elegant, handsome, accomplished person. Mrs. Hodgson told me she believes he is nephew and heir

to Fenwick of Fenwick ; that is, in case his uncle never marries again. I think he is son of a half-sister of Mr. Fenwick's who made a romantic run-away match with some one who may become a nobleman some day. I fancy Roscommon Lyall is an assumed name."

"I should prefer his being a mere gentleman, with no mystery or disguise about him," said my father; "but at any rate he is a very accomplished person, and a great acquisition to the Hodgsons' parties. How pale and tired Ada looks!" said my father, taking me in his arms, and kissing me tenderly. "Go to bed at once, my child."

He blessed me, and so did my dear, dear mother; and I kissed them for the first time in my life with my lips only, not with my heart!

I was all anxiety to be alone—alone in my own little chamber, that, like a miser

opening his money chest to count over his hoard, I might open my heart, and gloat over its treasures. What a purple light of love seemed to fill the little room, as I threw myself into an easy chair by my little bed, and thought over that enchanting evening, and, closing my own eyes, fancied I saw *his* gazing on me, with that intense half melancholy interest, which had wakened all the slumbering passion of my heart !

After indulging for an hour at least in this reverie, I opened my window. It was a very calm night. The moon was shining brightly down on the garden, the dark forest on one side, the purple moors beyond, and the ivy-mantled tower of our dear little old church. I could not see the great German Ocean from my window, but I could hear the soft sighing of the waves wooed by the night breeze, and the liquid splash of the ripple as it broke upon the beach.

As I gazed on the calm beauty of that sweet night in early autumn, and contrasted its exquisite stillness with the tumult in my own heart, I tried to catch, from the tranquil and translucent azure of the sky, the dark stillness of the forests and the moors, and the spiritual light of the silver moon, something of the universal and heavenly repose and peace.

By degrees the wild excitement and unrest of my heart lapsed into a soft melancholy, and then strange presentiments of coming sorrow and evil stole over my spirit.

The wind rose a little, and waved the foliage of the dark yew and cypress trees that grew near my window, so that the dark branches seemed to me like the plumes of a hearse.

An owl, who for more than a century had tenanted the church tower, began to hoot, and, roused by the sound, our house-dog

howled. My father had trained me up, all Borderer as I was, to despise superstition, but a rival master undid in an hour the teaching of a life. First love is the very slave of forebodings, omens, and wild fancies of all kinds. I grew cold and white with fear of I knew not what, and hastily repairing to bed, where I lay long gazing through my tears at "the sun of the sleepless," my spirit at last floated over the crystal bridge into the land of dreams, and there I was kneeling in white robes veiled and crowned with orange blossoms at the altar by Roscommon Lyall's side, when, lo ! the altar vanished ; a tomb replaced it ; my white lace veil changed into black crape, my white satin robes into a deep mourning garb. I was quite alone, and in the agony of my grief I wept, and waking, found my pillow wet with tears.

Prayer came to my aid to calm my aching

heart and perturbed spirit; and having prayed long and fervently, I sank into a sleep and dreamless sleep, and did not wake till Bessie came to call me.

CHAPTER XXII.

LOVE'S YOUNG DREAM.

“OH, Miss Ada,” cried Bessie, “do be quick ! Master and Missus are taking a turn in the garden thegither, waitin’ for ye, and here are you as sound as a’ the sivin sleepers thegither ! See how the sun’s shining, and hear the birdies singin’, and a’ to wak’ ye up ! It’s a sin and a shame to be in bed on sic a morn ! Now busk ye, like a bonnie lassie as ye are, for ye ken weel if onything can anger the master it’s your bein’ late, an’ keepin’ us a’ waitin’ for prayers !”

I rose at once, and dressed rapidly. With the shades of night, all sadness, all forebodings of evil had departed.

The sunshine was not brighter, nor the birds more glad, than my spirit. The moment I waked I thought of *him* ! I felt like the possessor of a sweet and inexhaustible treasure. I had come suddenly into a grand inheritance—one beside which Moordell Hall and its large estate seemed poor and pale—first and passionate love !

“I shall see him to-day !” I said to myself. “I feel I shall !”

I did not ask myself why at that thought my cheeks glowed and my heart throbbed even in the solitude of my own chamber. I did not think how it would end—no thought of marriage or of any worldly arrangement crossed my mind. It was that absorbing, mystic, pure, and delicious feeling—a girl's first love !

“Well, Ada’s slumbers have quite restored her bloom,” said my father, as I poured out his coffee. “Our pale lily is becoming a red, red rose! What say you, Mamma, to a drive to Alnwick to-day? You want, of course, to make some purchases for the ball?”

“What say you, Ada?” cried my mother. “You can drive me in the pony chaise?”

My heart sank within me. Go to Alnwick—be away all day—when I felt certain he would call! Oh, I could not bear such a trial! I said—

“I would rather go to-morrow, Mamma. I have many things I want to do to-day.”

I felt ashamed of my own insincerity, and blushed deeply as I spoke.

My kind mother took no notice of my confusion—perhaps she saw into my heart. She only said—“Very well. To-morrow, then; that will do quite as well.”

Breakfast over, my father went out on parish business ; my mother took her needle-work, and settled calmly down in her favourite window-seat, inviting me to join her.

The old gardener was mowing the lawn ; Bessie was busy with her cleanings and her scrubblings ;—everything went on as usual. There was change but in myself.

But I ? Oh, the strange restlessness—the feverish watch—the nervous tumult—the bewildering hope—the baseless ecstacy ! The scene was as much changed for me as is a landscape when we look at it through crimson or orange-coloured glass after having beheld it through blue or green. I could do nothing—nothing but watch the road along which he would probably come from the Hall to the Vicarage.

Long before it was at all likely that any visitor—a stranger particularly—would

think of calling, I was on the watch. How anxious I felt about my appearance that day ! How often I arranged and disarranged my hair ! How capriciously I arrayed myself in all my best morning dresses by turns, and put on and threw off white and coloured muslins, and blue, pink, mauve, and green ribbons, and could not be satisfied with myself ! And when I heard the sound of wheels or of a horse's hoofs, how my heart beat—how my colour came and went—how the brush fell from my nerveless hand—and how, after pining for his arrival all day, I hoped that it might not be he ! I was not ready—not ready in mind or person,—all flutter, confusion, and hurry !

I know not how that day passed away, but it did pass, and I heard the church clock strike four.

A few minutes after, the Hodgsons' carriage drove up to the gate.

“He is come!” I said to myself, and sank into a chair, giddy with joy.

Recovering by a strong effort, I hurried downstairs into the drawing-room.

There were Mrs. Hodgson and her daughters. But *he* was not there!

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE PASSING CLOUD.

THOSE only who have loved can picture to themselves the bitter disappointment, the almost tearful visitation of spirit, the sickening sinking of the heart, which followed a whole day of tremulous excitement and delicious hope.

Oh, how wearisome to me was the conversation of Mrs. Hodgson ! How impatient I felt of all the commonplaces of her daughters ! At length, however, one of them spoke of Mr. Roscommon Lyall, and then I listened with my very heart.

“He was summoned to town by telegraph,” said Margaretta Ann, “or else he would have called with us. He has been raving about you, Ada, and your black eyes and golden hair !”

“Oh, it’s a regular case of ‘smite,’ ” said Mrs. Hodgson. “I don’t know what he’s gone about, but I could see he was very down in the mouth at going. He said he should be back to-morrow, and that he wouldn’t miss the Castle ball for I don’t know what.”

“Oh, Ada !” said Margaretta, taking a book out of her bag, “I forgot to tell you he has sent you Mrs. Barrett Browning’s ‘Aurora Leigh’ and other poems. He said you wanted to read it, and he happened to have it by him ; but I believe that’s a fib ; he was up and out very early this morning, and I think he walked over to Warkworth and bought it there. At any rate, here it is, and much good may it do you !”

“ I can’t make head or tail of it,” said Mrs. Hodgson. “ But all the new-fangled poetry seems to me to come red-hot from Bedlam—there’s neither rhyme nor reason in it. What do you call it, Margaretta Ann ?”

“ Spasmodic, Mamma !”

“ Spasmodic, is it ? Well, I’m sure it would give me the spasms were I to read much of it. Just compare it with Pope’s ‘ Essay on Man,’ or Goldsmith’s ‘ Deserted Village,’ or Thomson’s ‘ Seasons,’ or Cowper’s Poems. There’s sense and sound too ; but my girls like sound without sense.”

I could not answer her. I was too absorbed by my own delight in holding in my hand an evidence that ‘ he ’ had thought of me,—that he had remembered our conversation, and my confession that I had never read ‘ Aurora Leigh,’—that he had risen

early (he not fond of early rising) to walk over to Warkworth to get it for me. Of course he had meant to have brought it himself!"

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At length the Hodgsons' visit came to an end.

My mother, always rather delicate in hot weather, went to her room to lie down till dinner-time; and I, taking my large garden hat from its peg in the hall, hurried down to the wild sea-shore, there to read, or try to read, the book *he* had sent me. A magic volume it was to me.

The arch-enchanter, first love, made it feel in my hot trembling hands as no book had ever felt before. The print did not seem like common print, nor the paper common paper. The leaves were cut. Many passages were marked. Some of the poems he had praised—"Lady Geraldine's Courtship,"

“The Queen at Westminster Abbey, 1837,” and several others, were pointed out to me by sprigs of myrtle and jasmine. I could not fix my thoughts enough to read. My eyes wandered over the pages, but my thoughts were far away—with “him,” wherever he might be. I dreamt over the book till I heard Bessie’s voice in the distance calling me. I rushed home barely in time to go in to dinner with my father and mother. I did not see Roscommon Lyall again till we met at the Castle ball. But in the meantime every day something occurred to show that he was thinking of me. One morning came a newspaper, in which a lively, witty leader was marked in pencil and signed “R. L.” It was directed to my father, but I felt it was meant for *me*, for it was “On the Employment of Women,” a subject then beginning to occupy the public mind. The most eloquent tributes to the intellect and

moral qualities of women abounded in this leader. I thought I had never read anything so beautiful. When my father was out, and my mother engaged, I took the paper up into my room to read the leader again and again, through my tears, and to kiss the letters *his* hand had traced.

The next day brought a volume of his poems, and his "last new novel," with, oh joy! oh rapture! as frontispiece to the former, his own portrait engraved, and his autograph lithographed in the words, "Faithfully yours, Roscommon Lyall."

Faithfully yours! Oh, in those commonplace words, which generally mean nothing and convey nothing, how much had my young heart and wild fancy discovered! To me they promised that earthly paradise that one loved being *faithfully yours* can redeem for woman out of the wilderness of the world!

With regard to the novel, I could not judge of it as of any other book: I read it with my heart, not my mind. In every word the hero said, in everything he did, looked, thought, I saw Roscommon Lyall—and that reconciled me to much that I should else even then have condemned. I have never dared in after-years to open the work. The memories it would conjure up would be too painful; but I believe all the critics condemned it, and though at the time that only made me prize it the more, and look upon its author as a martyr to their envy, I have no doubt now that it deserved their censure.

On the third day the Hodgsons called again, and brought a roll of music, “Lyall Roscommon’s Songs of the Heart,” words and melodies by himself. He had sent two sets down to the Hall, begging that Mrs. Hodgson would take or forward one “to his

fair friend at the Vicarage." They talked a little of Roscommon Lyall, but, to my great disappointment, a great deal more about the ball. Their own dresses, about which I felt no interest,—mine, for which I only cared with reference to him—chiefly engrossed them.

By a few random careless words they made me feel very desolate, and as if the ball would be to me wearisome and joyless. Those words were—

"Mr. Roscommon Lyall *says* he shall meet us at the ball, but we don't believe it; there's a grand private fête at Cremorne on the same evening, and Smithkin thinks it very unlikely Roscommon Lyall would miss *that*," said Miss Hodgson.

"It's so select, and the grand affair of the year! He's on the committee too!" said Miss Araminta.

"As Smithkin says, it's not very likely

he'd come three hundred miles and more for a ball here, when there's such a counter-attraction in town on the same evening. There's no inducement."

I think Margaretta Ann, who made that remark, and who was very jealous of Roscommon Lyall's pointed attentions to me, was actuated by a little spite, for she glanced at me as she spoke. I fear I must have turned pale; and she, having, in spite of her jealousy, a good heart, felt for me, for she added—

"But, after all, he *may* come. There's no knowing what these young men of fashion will or will not do for a whim."

"And then our Border rose comes out at that ball," said Mrs. Hodgson. "And as I said before, I'm sure *that* was a regular case of 'smite.'"

"Oh," said Miss Hodgson, "I think with Smithkin, he'll go to the aristocratic fête at

Cremorne. I believe he first suggested the idea. A certain clique of the *beau monde* have hired the gardens for one evening—tickets two guineas each,—vouchers required as if for Almack's,—opera singers, and I know not what. Mr. Lyall must be there!"

No more was said on the subject. They departed soon after, and when they were gone I rushed out into the garden and thence down to the wild sea-shore, there to give vent to the pent-up and passionate disappointment of my heart, in floods of tears.

How like the effect of the sun on the outer world is that of happy love on the inner one! All my interest in the ball was gone. My beautiful white tulle dress, my satin slip, my wreath and bouquets of white May, and all the minor accessories of the prettiest and most tasteful toilette *débutante* ever wore, disposed me much more to weep than to rejoice.

I was obliged to plead a headache,—when a heartache was my real ill,—to account for my strange, thankless, and unnatural conduct. My dear mother advised me to lie down and try to get a little sleep, for this was the very morning of the day on which the ball was to take place. Even, little as she cared for the triumphs of vanity and the pleasures of this world in a general way, even she wished me to look my best on that night.

To oblige that dear mother I did lie down; but my very heart was full of tears, and I could not rest. When, lo! from behind the cloud so dark and heavy with rain-drops, the sun came forth brighter than ever. I heard the gate bell ring, and, springing from my bed, I rushed to my window. A railway porter was there. He had a deal box in his hand. I hurried downstairs to intercept Bessie as she brought it in. It

was directed to my mother, but in *his* dear hand.

I tried to compose myself, and accompanied Bessie with it to the store-room, where my mother was busy.

Perhaps she guessed at my impatience, for she opened the box at once. It contained a bouquet, the most beautiful I had ever seen, and a note to my mother. The note was dated "The Swan, Alnwick."

He *was* come then ! he would be at the ball. I felt dizzy and faint with the sudden revulsion, the tumultuous joy. My mother was reading his note, and, luckily, before she turned round to hand it to me I had recovered my self-possession.

In the note he merely begged my mother's permission to present me with a bouquet for my first ball. He added that he had arrived in Alnwick that very hour, and begged to be allowed to remind Miss Moore

of her promise with regard to the first dances.

An exquisite bouquet-holder of mother-of-pearl accompanied the flowers.

“A very pretty, graceful attention,” said my mother. “And of course you can acknowledge it only by accepting it, Ada. And, lo! there is the poor dear old Count; and he too is armed with a bouquet. He has, I am certain, stripped his little greenhouse for you, Ada. You must wear the Count’s bouquet in your bosom, and carry Mr. Lyall’s in your hand. Of course my Ada would not, for any new friend in the world, slight the offering of the dear old man who has loved her from her cradle.”

Alas, how selfish a passion is love! I had been thinking that to wear any flowers but those Roscommon gave me would be to make too little of his exquisite gift.

I of course agreed to my mother’s pro-

posal. It was easy of accomplishment, because the Count's bouquet, though composed of all the best flowers in his greenhouse, was very small compared to Roscommon's.

But the gifts and adventures of this great day was not yet over. One of Mr. Fenwick's footmen came soon after with two beautiful hot-house bouquets for my mother and me, and two exquisitely carved fans with ivory and sandal-wood sticks, and white crape fans richly studded with seed-pearls and gold. A letter to my mother accompanied these presents.

Mr. Fenwick of Fenwick said, "My dear Mrs. Moore, I have been vainly trying to screw my courage to the sticking-place, namely, to make up my mind to go to the Castle ball this evening. But it is so long since I have been at a ball, and a ball *there* would be so fraught with painful memories, and my eye-sight is just now so bad, and

altogether I am so little fit for such a scene, that I hope you and my fair young friend will excuse me. Of course my object in going would have been the pleasure of a chat with you, and that of witnessing her *début*. As, however, that may not be, I have resolved, on my way to the station,—for I have to be in Newcastle early to-morrow, and shall sleep there to-night,—to look in at the Vicarage, and see the loveliest mother and the prettiest daughter in the world dressed for the ball. The bouquets and fans I have taken the liberty of sending will, I hope, be accepted as small tokens of the great regard of, dear Mrs. Moore, your most attached and obliged, COSMO FENWICK.”

A beautiful set of pearl ornaments from Mrs. Hodgson, and one of ivory ball tablets, carved by himself, from the Signore, closed the list of my friends’ most timely and acceptable presents. The Signore had sur-

rounded my initials of A. M. with a beautiful wreath of rose-buds. It was exquisitely done, and must have been a work of great time and labour.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MY FIRST BALL.

My toilette was completed—my dear mother had arranged my hair and laced my dress.

The diaphanous drapery I wore was not lighter than my heart, nor the flowers in my bosom and my hand fresher than my feelings.

Fenwick of Fenwick had arrived just as my mother, kissing me tenderly, pronounced that I should do, and at her request I hastened downstairs to thank him for his presents, and to pour out my father's tea.

Mr. Fenwick had never before seen me in any but a high dress. He came very close to me. He could not see at a distance, and I was rather annoyed by the proximity of his large, and to me awful, face as he bent over me to examine my wreath, my pearls, and the Count's flowers.

"You will be the queen of the ball, Miss Moore," he said; "and as it is firmly believed, and generally reported here, that you are the heiress of Moordell Hall, the worshippers of the golden calf," he added gravely smiling, "will make an idol of you. Don't let them turn your head. I firmly believe your uncle Sir James will marry."

"I hope he may," I said. "I should be sorry to be courted because I was supposed to be an heiress. I hope any one I could like will look upon me only as Ada Moore, the vicar's daughter."

"There is, perhaps, only one in the world

who would do that," he said, taking my hand and glaring fiercely at me (at least so it seemed to me) with his large prominent eyes.

My father and mother came in at this moment, and soon after his servant sent to say that his master would certainly miss the train if he stayed any longer.

Mr. Fenwick then departed, having invited himself to spend the next evening with us on his return from Newcastle, to hear all about the Castle ball, and how many conquests the heiress of Moordell Hall had made.

Fortunately he did not stay to see us depart for the ball, or he would have been offended no doubt (for he was very touchy) to see that my mother alone took his bouquet with her. I, having already Roscommon's superb nosegay in my hand, and the Count's flowers in my bosom, could not, without

appearing ridiculous, carry any other bouquet.

The Count and the Signore, who were to go with us in the fly, now arrived.

I am certain nothing short of the lively interest those true old friends took in my *début*, both for my parents' sake and my own, would have induced them to go to the Castle ball.

In the first place, their strict economy and noble abhorrence of debt and pecuniary obligation of every kind, had made them constantly decline—much as they loved society, and much as they were calculated to adorn it—all invitations that involved any outlay.

Tears came into my eyes when I saw (for I knew every article of their wardrobes well) the contrivances they had made, to appear, without incurring any expense they could not afford, in evening costume; but they

were both so handy, so clever, so completely *hommes à ressources*, that their appearance was after all such that any ladies might have been proud of their escort. And yet the Count had himself converted a frock into a dress coat without injury to it in its former state, and the Signore had made a pair of evening shoes out of some old boots.

Both were singularly noble and distinguished-looking men in themselves. The one, quite the *beau idéal* of the *vieille noblesse* of France—bowing, complimentary, sparkling, ceremonious, and animated. The other, stately, reserved, melancholy, and silent.

The Count wore a frill to his shirt of old point, and ruffles of the same; and on that loyal, generous old heart he wore the order of St. Louis, which had been conferred on him by Louis Seize. He had a ring on his finger and a snuff-box in his pocket, also gifts of his sovereign. The portraits of

Louis and his lovely queen, exquisitely painted on enamel and set round with diamonds, formed the lid of the box.

These jewels had been, when first his parents arrived as “refugees” in Northumberland, pledged to the chief jeweller in Newcastle. The Count had, by self-denial and industry, been enabled to redeem them, and many other family relics—to such a heart and mind as his invaluable.

He was in high spirits, and very complimentary on my appearance and my mother's.

He improvised on the spot the following stanza, which he sang with great expression but very little voice, taking up my guitar and striking a few chords by way of accompaniment. He addressed himself to my mother:—

“En voyant auprès de vous ce charmant rejeton,
De votre orgueil secret je devine la cause ;
La rose sait donner de l'éclat au bouton,
Et un joli bouton embellit la rose !”

How courteously he handed that dear, lovely mother into the carriage ! How merry and amusing he was, during the whole of the long drive to the Castle !

My father drove, and the Signore sat beside him on the box.

So we had only the dear old Count to beguile the way ; and he did it so well, that when we reached the Castle gates my dear mother, to his great delight, said, “ *Déjà !* ”

CHAPTER XXV.

THE PURPLE LIGHT OF LOVE.

OH, golden youth and rosy love ! what a bower of Eden can you make even among the artificial flowers and glaring gaslights of a modern ball ! What a scene of enchantment to the girl of seventeen is that motley assemblage of full-dressed, panting, flushed, and selfish mortals, dancing for the most part so badly and so ungracefully, and so discontented, self-engrossed, and uneasy, the ladies in their corsets, the men in their dress boots, and both in their vain minds. What

an assemblage of wigs made to look like people's own hair, and people's own hair made to look like wigs ! What worn-out faces, and grim attempts at mirth and wit ! What false colours in every sense of the word ! What madness, on a lovely moonlit night, when the soft breeze shakes the fragrance from every flower and blossoming shrub to enrich the air, and when the moon, with her court of stars, is making night so beautiful, and Philomel is filling the woods with melody,—what madness does it seem to crowd together in hot ball-rooms, where no one can obtain a tithe of the hogsheads of fresh air, which science tells us every pair of human lungs requires !—to prefer chalked floors to the velvet sod—glaring gas to the silver moonlight—musk and amber and other chemical extracts to the incense of the flowers—instrumental music to the nightingale,—and jigging and jogging along

in an ungraceful, quick waltz or polka, with a dull or insolent stranger, to the sweet concourse of sympathizing and true friends in a moonlit ramble !

It is thus, in after-life, most people think when shut up in the suffocating atmosphere of a crowded ball-room.

But at seventeen, and at a first ball, the whole scene is one of enchantment. To me it seemed indeed a foretaste of Elysium, for Roscommon Lyall was awaiting our arrival in the refreshment-room ; and when his dark eyes met mine, and his smile was shining into my heart, and his voice was in my ear, my cup of happiness seem to overflow.

The Duke and Duchess received us with that extreme affability and even warmth of cordiality, to which our old Border blood entitled us in their opinion. The Duchess, intensely aristocratic by birth, breeding, and nature, distinguished the Count, dear and

noble old martyr to the Bourbon cause, more graciously and more kindly than if that old dynasty had been in its glory. She spoke French in perfection, for she had been educated in Paris. Her grandmother, one of the *ancienne noblesse*, had been one of Marie Antoinette's *dames d'honneur*, and had narrowly escaped with her noble head on her fair shoulders during the Reign of Terror. Her Grace talked to the Count with great animation. She made him join her own whist-table; and from the ball-room I saw with pleasure his white hand and diamond ring, with its point-lace ruffle, handing to the Duchess, for her inspection, the snuff-box I had known from my infancy, with the portraits of Louis Seize and Marie Antoinette enamelled in the diamond-framed lid. I rejoiced, too, to see that the dear old Count was the lion of the Duchess's exclusive coterie.

The Duke, whose politics savoured of liberalism, was, on the other hand, much charmed with the Signore. His Grace sympathized intensely with young Italy in her struggles to be free; and having been a good deal in Rome and Naples in his youth, he knew much of the country and the people. He introduced the Signore to an Italian nobleman, also a *réfugié*, who was living at the Castle; and I saw these two patriots, their dark eyes flashing, their fine heads of long and thick black hair meeting, their national enthusiasm animating their graceful gestures, and flushing their marked features and dark complexions, as they talked over the wrongs of "*Italia bella*" in the window recess of the antique time-worn turret to which they had retired, and from which they could see the moon silvering the great North Sea.

The Hodgsons' party arrived very late

and dreadfully over-dressed. Smithkin was, as Roscommon Lyall observed, worthy to be immortalized in 'Punch' or 'Fun.'

Vulgar and absurd as they were, my dear mother would not desert them in a ball-room where they knew scarcely any one but ourselves.

Smithkin did not ask me to dance. He only bowed very stiffly, colouring the while to the roots of his light sandy hair, so that the wonderful parting that divided his head before and behind in two equal parts looked like a narrow scarlet ribbon.

Roscommon Lyall wanted to continue doing as he had done up to the arrival of the Hodgsons—namely, whenever he was not dancing with me himself, standing as near me as he could, holding my fan and my bouquet. I, however, having perceived that the Misses Hodgson had no partners, insisted on his asking them all in turn.

He complied,—as he said, “to show his obedience to his liege lady.”

He had introduced many of the most elegant young men present to me. They all seemed to know him, and to think a great deal of him.

I was not a little proud of the open and exclusive devotion of one who was evidently a leader among the nobly born and highly bred of his own sex.

Lady Beatrice Eden, dressed in the purest white, with her large pellucid eyes, her shadowy hair, and her sylph-like form, contrived on several occasions to draw near me.

She could not join in the dance, for the state of her health rendered it dangerous for her to do so, and she watched the lively scene with a melancholy smile, such as an angel might have worn.

Alas ! first love is a very selfish feeling ;

and since our first meeting, when I had so cordially responded to her sudden friendship, a great change had taken place in my heart. I hate myself when I remember that I felt impatient of her presence, for it destroyed my ball-room *tête-à-tête* with *him* !

Long before midnight the sweet girl retired to her room.

As for myself, I was the object of so much attention and apparent admiration that I began to grow vain, and to think I must have more potent charms than I had ever believed myself to possess.

It did not occur to me that it was to the “supposed” heiress of Moordell Hall that all this homage was paid.

I know it now, for now I know the world.

I am aware how little beauty goes a great way, if its possessor is, or has the reputation of being, an heiress.

Since that, my first ball, I have seen, again and again a handsomer girl than I was even then, sit a whole evening at a ball by her mother's side, without one partner, because it was well known that her face was her fortune.

The Hodgson party, in spite of what I had compelled Roscommon Lyall to do, were very sulky and cross, until, to oblige me, he got partners for these young ladies.

This he did by telling the headless, heartless young men whom he offered to introduce, that each of the Misses Hodgson had fifty thousand pounds.

He fixed the sum at random; but as it got whispered about, all the most stylish and best-dressed men crowded round the hitherto isolated Hodgson party, for they were the very men most deeply in debt, and most keenly on the look-out for wives with money. Smithkin—"snob" as they con-

sidered him—was introduced to sisters—also, alas ! seeking their fortunes.

Even Mrs. Hodgson had artful dodgers of the higher class paying her little attentions, and affecting to laugh at her jokes, while they were in reality ridiculing her *malaprops*—all in the hope of invitations to the Hall, where the “fifty thousand pounders,” as Roscommon called them, could be “wooded and won.”

Mr. Hodgson (*père*) had, at the last moment, resolved not to go to the ball; and Mrs. Hodgson was complaining to the young sneerers around her, who were shamming attention and sympathy, of what she called “the shabby trick her better ’alf, ’Odgson, had played her.”

Smithkin having got an Honourable Miss Feuilemorte—a very thin, elderly young lady—to dance with him, looked down with supreme contempt on me.

Roscommon engaged him as our *vis-à-vis*, to enjoy his airs and empower him to show them off.

The quadrilles we were dancing were a new set, which the Alnwick dancing-master had invented, and which therefore I knew. Being a novelty, people crowded round to see the figures, and while I was coming forward, in a sort of solo, I felt rather than saw that the dark eyes of a tall, pale young man, looking on at the dance, were fixed intently upon me.

I knew the face well, but could not at that moment remember where I had seen it.

The dance over, however, I saw my mother and father shaking hands with the stranger.

Roscommon also had noticed—for nothing escaped him where I was concerned—how earnestly he had watched me during the

quadrille. Seeing my eyes follow him, he said—

“Does Miss Moore happen to know that very grave, pedagoguish youth in black? I see Mr. and Mrs. Moore are welcoming him heartily. Who and what can he be?”

At this moment my father led him up to me, and said—

“Ada, you remember your old fellow-student, Harry Blake.”

I held out my hand, and he, blushing and stammering and scarcely daring to touch it, tried to say something comprehensible, but did not succeed.

Harry Blake did not dance; and my mother, the very soul of kindness, invited him to sit by her and talk of old times; and a waltz striking up at this moment, I was soon whirled, by Roscommon, to the further end of the room. When there, we stopped, and drawing me into a window recess, he said—

“May I know the history of that youth who is so much alarmed that he is quite alarming? I will not conceal from you that everything, in any way connected with you, is intensely interesting to me.”

“His name is Harry Blake,” I said. “He was a village lad whom my father taught; but he has genius and industry, and is now one of the most promising sons of Alma Mater.”

“Ah! I see,” he replied: “a sort of Claude Melnotte, but without his grace, brass, and talents, though he may have ten times his learning and sterling worth; and I am much mistaken if he is not as madly in love as was the gardener’s son. I dare say he would sing, if he dared, ‘From my first years, my soul was filled with thee.’”

I tried to laugh off this accusation, but I did not feel quite sure that it was unfounded. However, when I joined my mo-

ther again, she told me Harry Blake was gone,—that he had been invited to the ball by one of the Duke's nephews, whom he had “coached” so successfully at Oxford that he had taken honours, and who, in consequence, was very grateful to Harry Blake.

“He came with his pupil and he is gone with him,” said my mother. “They sleep at the Swan, and start at six to-morrow morning. Harry is very interesting and intellectual, but so shy, poor fellow !”

“That graft of a bookworm on a clod never answers,” said Rosecommon Lyall apart to me as we went down to supper. “I know no greater bore !”

I did not quite like this sarcastic speech, and he saw that I did not. The next moment he said—

“I am unjust to the poor youth ; he *is* interesting and clever, but I am jealous of

any one who dares even in secret to—to—love—you !”

I trembled, blushed, and cast down my eyes. A thrill of ecstasy passed through my frame. He had confessed that he was jealous ! The next moment he added—

“ May I address myself to your parents, Miss Moore ? If I obtain their consent, may I hope for yours ?”

I suppose my lips murmured “ Yes,” for he passionately whispered—

“ Heaven bless you, Ada ! *my* Ada !”

* * * *

It was three o'clock in the morning when we reached the Vicarage. The Count had talked all the way home. He was in very high spirits. So was the Signore. I scarcely saw or heard them—I was in another world. I leant back in the carriage and closed my eyes. They thought I slept, and spoke low in consequence. I did not

sleep, but yet I dreamt. For not more real or substantial than a dream was that mirage of the fancy, that ideal Eden of the heart !

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE BETROTHAL.

THE next day, after breakfast, when my father was in his study, and my mother and I were working together in the little morning room—unable any longer to keep my secret from that tender parent, I threw myself into her arms, and, weeping on her bosom, confessed that I loved Rosecommon Lyall and was loved by him, and that I expected he would call that very day to ask her consent and my father's.

“To an engagement? I hope, my love,” said my mother—her tears and kisses falling

fast, but gently, on my face—"not to an immediate union at your early age, and on so slight an acquaintance? You are not in such a hurry to leave us, Ada?"

"Oh no, my dear Mamma!" I said. "Only, as he loves me so fondly, and I love him with all my heart, do use your influence with Papa. I don't think Papa likes him very much; and yet he is so good, so clever, so noble, and so true!"

My mother smiled, and said—

"If he *is* all these, he will not object to a year's engagement, for it is only plated articles that need fear to lose by time. I know your father had hoped that you might have learnt to value the mental accomplishments and really good heart of Mr. Fenwick. He has cast aside all his false, free-thinking notions, and is become one of the best of Christians and of men!"

"Oh, Mamma!" I cried in terror, "I

both dread and loathe him, at least when I think of him as anything but a mere acquaintance. Oh ! his large, light, prominent eyes ! his wild, spiral curls of iron-grey hair ! his massive features ! his cruel mouth, heavy chin, and gigantic form !”

“ Nay, my love, he is a much handsomer man than Mr. Roscommon Lyall.”

“ Handsome ! I think him an ogre, Mamma ; and I would rather live in a hut with Roscommon, Mamma, than in a palace with Mr. Fenwick. The mere thought of him as a lover or a husband fills me with horror and dismay.”

“ Nay, then, the idea of your marrying him is, of course, quite out of the question,” said my mother.

“ And then, Mamma, think how he treated his first wife and his only child !”

“ He has bitterly repented of his harshness to them, and has explained all to your father,

who feels certain he meant well, and who thinks Mrs. Fenwick was much to blame to leave him as she did."

While we were talking, an elegant phaeton stopped at the garden gate. Through the white jasmine and purple clematis and the lace curtains I recognised *him*. He was driving. I saw his fine profile, his waving black hair, and his white buckskin gloves.

Almost faint with joy, and trembling in every limb, I rushed upstairs, and I heard his voice as I listened on the landing, asking for Mr. and Mrs. Moore.

My father's study was beneath my room, and presently I could hear two deep male voices in earnest converse, to which presently my mother's sweet treble was added.

Half an hour passed and still they were heard, those three dear voices; and then the study bell rang, and Bessie came to say I was wanted immediately.

How I got into the study I know not. There are moments in our lives when our bodies seem to move by habit or instinct, or something apart from the influence of mind or will, and we find ourselves in the place where we would be, but oblivious as to how we got there.

Thus it was with me. I found myself in my father's study I know not how. Roscommon Lyall was there. He rose to meet me, and took my hand.

“Ada,” said my father, who was very pale, “Mr. Lyall tells me you have authorized him to ask your mother's consent and mine to your betrothal. It seems somewhat sudden, Ada. You are very young, and you have seen so little of Mr. Lyall and he of you : how can you judge whether you are suited to each other ?”

“We feel we are,” said Roscommon.
“Do we not, dearest ?”

“ Let Ada speak for herself, Mr. Lyall,” said my father gravely.

I was much agitated; but raising my tearful eyes, they met Roscommon’s imploring glance, and I said, “ I know, I feel we are suited to each other, Papa.”

“ I can only consent,” said my father, “ to a conditional engagement. If, a year hence, you are both of the same mind, and this sudden fancy has ripened into true love, then if you, Mr. Lyall, are in circumstances to maintain my daughter as a lady, then I will not oppose your union, nor, I am certain, will your mother, Ada.”

“ And in the meantime we may correspond, may we not ?” said Roscommon Lyall in a pleading voice ; “ and I may visit Miss Moore when I can ? and I may hope that you will let her spend some little time in town with my mother and sisters occasionally ?”

“ We will talk of your last proposition

some time hence," said my father. "Of course you will be welcome here whenever you can make it convenient to come; and, my dear," he said, turning to my mother, "they may correspond—in moderation, may they not?" he added with a melancholy smile.

"Heaven first sent letters for some wretch's aid,
Some absent lover, or some captive maid,"

said my mother kindly; "we will not refuse them that solace."

Roscommon then took my hand, and slipped a ring on my finger. He embraced me in my parents' presence. We were engaged. My mother invited him to stay to dinner, and he and I went into the garden together to talk over our bright prospects.

* * * * *

Roscommon was obliged to leave us early. He had to go to town that evening, but he had promised to write before he retired to rest, and I consoled myself for his departure

in the delightful anticipation of a letter from him.

Rather late in the evening Mr. Fenwick arrived. I wanted my mother to tell him I was betrothed, to save him the mortification of a refusal ; but before we had decided what she should say he was announced.

Fenwick of Fenwick thought a good deal of his own advantages. He was what is commonly called a very fine man. In his youth he had been very handsome, and he knew it. He was of one of the oldest of our Border families, and he was very wealthy. Not merely his estate was one of the finest in the county, but he had a large funded property too, which, as he lived very much within his income, was constantly increasing. He had no doubt of being accepted, and he felt pretty sure of being loved, if not at first, in the end. Finding my mother and myself alone, he at once plunged *in medias res*.

He said, "I had never seen your dear Ada in full dress before last evening, Mrs. Moore, and I must own I had no idea she was half so lovely. I have thought of her ever since, and I am come to beg you and my dear friend Moore to give her to me to be my wife. I am certain that, brought up by *you*, Ada knows her duty, and that if you say *yes* she will not say *no*. Nor have I any fear on the score of her youth and inexperience. So good a daughter must, with proper training, make an excellent wife."

"I much regret, my dear Mr. Fenwick," said my mother, "that Ada has already lost her heart to another."

He was silent for some time, his eyes flashing, and the muscles of his large face working convulsively. Then, rather harshly, he asked the name of the happy swain.

"Mr. Roscommon Lyall," replied my

mother. “I think he is related to you,—is he not?”

“He is;—and I regret to hear Ada has fallen in love with him; for, though he is clever, gentlemanly, and popular, he’s volatile, and what it’s the fashion to call ‘fast.’ Besides, he has his way to make in the world; and though I doubt not his being smitten with our Border rose, yet it’s my belief that if he did not look upon her as the heiress of Moordell, he’d not have proposed to her at all. She’d better change her mind, and take a man who loves her for herself alone,—who’d rather have her as she is, than with Moordell for her dowry. If she marries me, I shall never leave her; my delight will be to build on the admirable foundation which you and her father have so carefully laid, Mrs. Moore,—a graceful monument of all female virtues and accomplishments. Now I should never leave her.

Roscommon Lyall, after the first few weeks, will return to town and to his fast friends. Ada will be lonely, deserted, and—”

“Pray don't misjudge Mr. Roscommon Lyall,” I said. “And indeed, Mr. Fenwick, much as I feel honoured by your preference, I cannot think it right to listen to you, for I have accepted Mr. Roscommon Lyall,—I am at this moment his betrothed.”

“*You are his betrothed!*” cried Fenwick of Fenwick; and all the dark passions of his earlier life lowered in his eyes, and caused his brow to darken, his frame to tremble, and his voice to grow husky. “Then, Miss Moore, I must say that I think you have not behaved well or fairly to me. Madam, you could not be ignorant, nor could your parents, that I have intended to propose to you ever since I first, in the intimacy of your pleasant home, discovered how easy it would be to make you, docile and plastic as

you are, all that I must love and admire in woman.”

I could not forbear a smile at the idea of what a martyrdom I had escaped,—nothing less than the being educated, by this awful, passionate being, eccentric if not partially insane, up to the standard of his *beau idéal* of a wife.

“That flattering fortune-hunter, Roscommon, has no doubt persuaded you that you are perfect, and you would rather believe *that* than think that you might in time, and with careful training, become so. He, no doubt, hopes that I shall make him an allowance, at any rate until he takes possession of Moordell Hall, but he’s mistaken ;—I’ll never give him another shilling ; and I advise you, before it is too late, to break off an engagement which must end in misery to both. Sir James will marry ; Roscommon will vent his disappointment on you ; you

will be a miserable woman, for he is a heartless, headless young fellow. I don't say that he hasn't some showy talents. He can dance and sing, and scribble sonnets and write novels, but there's nothing solid in his mind nor serious in his character."

"Sir, I will hear no more!" I replied angrily. "I am his affianced, and an insult to him is one to me; and I wonder you, Mr. Fenwick, can speak so ill of your own nephew."

"My nephew!" and he started. "Oh, he boasts of *that*, does he!"

"No," I replied. "I never heard him mention you."

"He'd better not," retorted Mr. Fenwick.

"But he *is* your nephew, is he not?" interposed my mother rather anxiously.

"He is my sister's son. But let's drop the subject. My friendship for you, Mrs. Moore, and my interest in Ada, make me

deeply regret that she should not have made a better choice. It is painful to me, under existing circumstances, to remain here any longer. My friend Moore, who knows how much I had built on passing my life with such a woman as I could have made of Ada, will understand my bitter disappointment."

He shook hands with my mother, bowed coldly to me, and left us.

* * * * *

Tenderly as my father and mother loved me, they had so high an opinion of Fenwick of Fenwick, and they so utterly disbelieved every rumour to his disadvantage, that I fear they regretted his alliance.

Perhaps, unconsciously to themselves, his large landed and funded property, his old Border blood, and his importance in the county, had something to do with this regret. In their eyes, he was a handsome, commanding, high-principled man, in the

prime of life. In mine, he was a huge tyrant, still full of a mistaken theory about moulding a woman to his will, and educating her up to a certain standard, although that experimental absurdity had lost him his first wife and his only child.

As I pondered on what my life would have been with his giant form and large, albeit handsome face ever by my side, his stern voice in my ear, and his indomitable will controlling my actions, I turned with feelings of tender rapture and passionate delight, to "the soft palace of a fairy fortune," in which my mind now dwelt with Roscommon Lyall.

I was sorry that my parents did not see my intended with my eyes, but I thought when they knew him better they would appreciate him more highly.

However, a new event of great importance to my father and mother soon engrossed

their thoughts and feelings, and left me to the full enjoyment,—one of the purest and most exquisite young Love brings in his cornucopia of delights,—that of a correspondence with my beloved.

The event to which I allude was nothing less than the arrival in London of Sir James Moore, of Moordell.

END OF VOL. I.

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